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MAI MAR 16 1976

232

MAI FEB 20 1979



MAR 1 1980

NOV 21 1980

PLA DEC 17 1980

MAI FEB 16 1982

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171.3 C59i

62-15692

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The importance of being imperfect

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*The Importance
of Being Imperfect*

*The Importance
of Being Imperfect*

By JOHN ROBERT CLARKE

DAVID McKAY COMPANY, INC.
New York

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Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 61-6982

Reprinted June 1961

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VAN REES PRESS • NEW YORK

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*The Importance
of Being Imperfect*

1.

So Everybody Is Misunderstood!

MODERN LIFE TODAY, WITH ALL ITS SCIENTIFIC and social advance, has continued to produce a surprising number of humorless, anxious men and astringent, nerveless women who say they are not perfect and behave as though they were. The wide public belief that these perfectionists comprise only a minority group of superior souls who work harder than anybody, and refer to it oftener, is not quite true. In their striving to reach or to maintain a fancied state of flawlessness they have invaded virtually every aspect of modern society.

Wherever found—in the bassinet, at the kitchen sink, at the stockholders' meeting, on the leaky garage roof, at church socials or behind college podiums, they have one telltale characteristic in common: perfectionists are picture-straighteners on the walls of life.

Since Adam and Eve and maybe before, these adroit joy-killers have been trying to straighten out awkward human nature, straighten out themselves, or exhibit themselves as so

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perfectly straightened out as to be the only creatures without blemish under the spotted sun. Somewhere is supposed to exist "the common herd," and we may have wondered why no one could be found who admitted belonging to it. Now we are beginning to surmise the truth about the common herd. Perfectionists invented it. They set it down low in a wide, misty valley where it would serve by invidious comparison to substantiate their claims to have risen above it. When Montaigne, thinking about the perfectionists of his own sixteenth century, wrote that "man must be measured without his stilts," he was genuinely concerned about the condition of man. He said that man had done better when he walked on all fours. His troubles began when he stood up, reasoned Montaigne, for he could not stop there and had to keep rising.

Throughout human history perfectionists have ultimately looked foolish. Their efforts at picture-straightening, no matter how much publicized and productive of disciples, never really straightened anything. For one thing, it has never been clear what is "perfect." A moment of century-hopping will show you what I mean.

Suppose that a woman of our day desiring to be socially perfect were to be dropped into medieval western Europe. She would at once have to shave her head back to the center of the crown, in conforming to a custom of those days which ultimately was to give us our expression "highbrow." On the street this unhappy perfectionist would have to get rid of her shopper's stare. Unless she fixed her eyes on a spot of ground two rods ahead of her, looking neither left nor right, she might run the risk of exposure to an incubus or "looks that kill" from other emissaries of the devil. In any case she could be considered socially suspect for having raised her eyes at all.

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Since all these requirements might be offensive to our modern woman, let us next shift her forward in time to see what happens to her in the late seventeenth century in England. Here, as one of the intelligent ladies about town she must give evidence that she has a mind. Preferably she should be brunette, carry a book, exhibit easy knowledge of its contents, never give an inch in debate with men, and in fact dangle them over the coals of her wit. Perfect behavior then called for women to be clever and incisive. But suppose, once our adaptable friend had read the book, adopted the incisiveness, and taken relish in her new mental freedom, we plucked her out of time once more and placed her in the middle of eighteenth-century England. Now she would be truly out of place. Women in this century of sentimentality were supposed to be blonde, blue-eyed, weep frequently, exhibit fluttery bewilderment and lovable stupidity when confronted with books and ideas. Above all, they were supposed to look into the great man's eyes and say, "How true!" to whatever he said. Surely now, tired of her quest for the perfect, she would have to sit down and concede that what seems perfect in one century usually turns out to be perfectly awful in the next.

One might suppose that, unlike perfectionists in other centuries, those of our own would be harder to observe because of the pace of modern life. We are hurrying a little too fast to notice too much. As early as 1830 a Frenchman, De Tocqueville, who came over here to observe American traits for a book, remarked that Americans hurry so fast that they have even invented a chair that moves, so that they can hurry while they sit. Since then, we have become more efficient as perfectionists in the art of hurrying. A few poets and foreign observers still suggest we slow down and look at the flowers, but our perfect hurrying is such that if ever we

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stopped on one of our greater freeways to look at a flower, it would be the last one we would ever see.

Fortunately, the human flowers of perfectionism are usually hurrying as fast as the rest of us, so that it becomes possible to see examples all around us. Among them is the person who has to win. A goodly portion of his satisfaction in life is derived from telling us of his triumphs, as well as from showing himself the perpetual winner by the simple device of making a number of other people look like losers. His memory becomes excellent, for it is exercised and applied with tireless enterprise to the correction of other people's stories and the ungilding of other people's lilies.

Success in his exertions relies, to be sure, on the willingness of docile friends to remain in the line of fire. But the compulsive winner has usually arranged to surround himself with other perfectionists who for reasons peculiar to themselves need to be perfect losers.

Still another flower of perfectionism is the social climber. We used to think that social climbers comprised a few ambitious persons anxiously ascending a social ladder while the rest of us remained virtuously on the ground. On the contrary, it would appear that few modern persons fail to have some sort of ladder on the rungs of which they can arrange their friends and enemies. Most interesting of all these ladders, however, is that of the perfectionist. For, whether he is ranging people on his ladder in terms of efficiency, charm, solvency, purity, devilishness, uniqueness of soul, social adjustment, or cookery, the perfectionist arranges to locate himself at the top.

Among these social climbers, for example, are the perfect sufferers who bring their own ladder of suffering. Daily, from the uppermost rung on which they have located themselves, they toil to dislodge those coming up from below with a

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claim to have suffered as excellently as they. True, these perfectionists come down from their ladders now and then, but only to pursue some of the most exhausting work ever undertaken by human beings: they gather and stockpile good reasons for anguish. Everywhere they go they are working. Their telephone is their Gethsemane. Their gardens bloom with flowers of disaster. Their houses are furnished with reminders of sorrow. Their very faces display such cultivated gloom that their claim, "Nobody knows what I go through," is simply not true in their neighborhood.

Many years ago in San Francisco after I had tried to get away from myself and other perfectionists by buying the sailing ship *Panacea*, on which I live and write these words, I used to have trouble in my morning walk to the village of Sausalito. My trouble had to do with one woman I usually encountered who was a perfect sufferer—so perfect, in fact, that regardless of the buoyancy with which I greeted the day, and no matter how amiable my greeting to her, she always turned my words into a cause for sorrow. Once as she came toward me I began to wonder, weary as I was of having my morning psyche crippled, just what words could be said in greeting to which she could not give back a sour answer. Noticing she had a small dog on a leash, I said, "Good morning, Mrs. Smith. What a charming little dog you have!"

It seemed to me that I had won, that this time her perfect suffering would not succeed in making me feel perfectly awful. After all, what could she say about a dog?

"He's growing old," she said and walked on.

The general effect of perfect sufferers is to make us feel awful, but there are other perfectionists who achieve the same result. Examples would be: toppers of stories, persons who refuse to go along on ventures where their ignorance

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might be exposed, pathological dusters of other people's houses, persons who experience tension and become angry watching others do slipshod work, and—of course—hardy perennial advice-givers, who tell you what they would do if they were you, which they are not.

These more obvious joykillers are joined in our society by other picture-straighteners who in a professional capacity straighten out for us in advance what we might prefer to straighten out for ourselves. For example, I have always been annoyed with the hidden lady at the public library who spends her days erasing marginal comments from library books. She rubs out scenery with an implacable eraser. I open a book and she has been there before me. Whoever she is, whatever her countenance and personal life may be, she remains fixed in my memory as a human type whose ancestors took down the Maypoles in England, and I cannot love her.

In earlier days I could brighten my hours with books by reading in the margins. When an author grew dull I turned with delight to his detractors. They had crawled with wet ink over the borders and used their corner positions to do battle with the author and with one another in a hail of exclamation points. "Perfectly true" would duel with "Very superficial" until "Gross misrepresentation" won the field. Indignation strove with devotion, and even in Darwin's lines on selection in primates you could find: "This proves that God is Love!" You could also find dangerous little words like "See page 53 where you claim the opposite." In a book called *Personality* the author closed a section saying, "The following chapter is devoted to proving this important point" to which an adversary added, "The point is of course obvious." I think he was right. And there he sat—until this woman expunged him from the record.

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I sit among clean margins now, as one who has lost alternatives, and can but vainly wish that this woman had kept her hands off these dissenters of an imperfect yesterday who gave me joy.

If librarians were the only professionals who engaged in rubbing out our scenery there might not be so many unhealthy perfectionist attitudes today. Unfortunately, one of the chief reasons for failure of modern people to live closer to the ground of life comes from an old habit of idealizing persons and events in the past—a habit which historians and educators still foster by their custom of rubbing out the scenery around what actually happened. That most of our great authors, statesmen and social leaders have been, at least a good share of the time, fantastic bunglers and half-way doers of their work, known to their closest friends as short-sighted and addled concerning some of the simplest functions in life; that the death of almost any one of these great men has led to the swift ransacking of their possessions on the part of relatives and other intimates anxious to burn or hide letters they know would sully the perfect picture of the great man—these are the portions of our historical scenery that have, to our loss, been rubbed out too soon. Without these professional perfectionists and their erasures we might have enjoyed the chance to figure out for ourselves what the balances are between good and evil, strong and weak, wise and foolish in human nature. When all this erasing has been done, however, nothing has remained in the tidied world of history to prevent us from following the same old roads of perfectionism that proved disastrous to our ancestors. Nothing has remained to warn us against building dreams too large to be contained in real life. In short, the most injurious of all perfectionists are those who *could* but for various reasons *won't* give us access to the wonderfully

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foolish, bungling, many-sided story of man on this imperfect planet.

A growing suspicion among psychologists, family doctors, educators, and social workers is that perfectionists are joyless persons from joyless traditions who spoil the simplest functioning of laughter, of acquaintance, of work and play, and of shared love.

Dr. Carl Jung, world-famous psychologist in Zurich, noted that a third of his patients were suffering not from neuroses but rather from the "emptiness" of their lives. A number of these patients were afflicted with what he called "a sort of orgiastic virtuousness which is just as infamous as a vice and leads to just as much injustice and violence." If perfectionism with all its disguises is more widespread today than hitherto supposed and has proved more expensive to the human nervous system than man can afford, it is time to stop paying for it where we have been paying—in the nervous system itself.

If we are going to reverse the downward trend of human relations which, in America at least, is reflected in the growing inability of millions of people to derive joy from one another, we will need to look to the perfectionists. They have been taking the living out of our living rooms. Perfectionists have had their share in bringing marital discontent to the point where one of every three marriages ends in divorce, to say nothing of having contributed to the millions of additional divorces-in-spirit of those couples who have deemed it practicable to go on existing together in a joyless slum illuminated by television.

It is time to find a new, imperfectionist way of looking at life that will increase our joy in relating to ourselves and others. This means that it is not enough to declare ourselves to be imperfect. Such declarations have usually turned out

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to be no more than handy verbal disguises behind which we continue, in perfectionist behavior, wasting those energies we need so badly for learning how to share joy with one another.

Very plainly I am going to suggest that much of our fun and usefulness in this world comes from *behaving* as imperfect persons who are not going to be perfect tomorrow. Until we revise our judgments about ourselves downward so that we habitually make allowances for the plain facts of human inability to see clearly, to understand well, and to perform consistently, we are in no condition to enjoy whatever life it is we have. We must stop being picture-straighteners on the walls of life before we can find and bring joy in life.

One of the most remarkable examples of living in terms of joy-sharing rather than picture-straightening comes out of ancient Egypt. A spectacular challenge is woven into the legend of Osiris and his underworld domain. To understand this legend is to see why Egyptians took the injunction to share joy so seriously. After death Egyptians were confronted by the god Osiris with a quiz that had to be answered honestly. After forty-two routine questions concerning how the deceased had lived, Osiris asked the crucial question which had two parts: "*Did you find joy?*" and "*Did you bring joy?*" What is startling to modern consciousness is the emphasis. Not your good works, services, gifts, creations, or even kindness were in question but rather—did you enjoy what you did? And did you bring joy to others in what you did with them? The whole significance of this in construing the Egyptian theory of human relations is bound up in the fact that the petitioner, who could not lie to Osiris, was given back his *khaabit* (or shadow) and a certain measure of continued existence if he could answer affirmatively these questions about having and giving joy. If he could not he was taken away forthwith and eaten by a hippopotamus.

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Today these grim ceremonials are far behind us. And yet, after thousands of years of elevating and perfecting ourselves, in consequence of which half of our hospital beds are filled with mental cases and, according to recent survey, one third of our adult American population stands in need of psychiatric attention, we are still being eaten by the hippopotamus. This animal, grown larger from gorging on generations of perfectionists, is today devouring us for our failure to take seriously the one simple demand: that we find and bring joy while we are doing whatever it is we do.

If you agree that we are rapidly becoming the busiest, noisiest, and loneliest people on earth and suspect that we need to descend from rickety little pyramids of our vanity and develop an imperfectionist view of life in order to love and be loved, there are at least two basic problems to be faced.

The first problem is that of learning to communicate with one another as imperfectionists. Although many books are written today on the art of talking together, the evidence of modern attitudes suggests we are reading them not as joy-sharing imperfectionists, but from motives that would call forth the hippopotamus: their rewards are seen in terms of salesmanship, better business, or in the seeking of agreements to avoid mutual clobbering—in other words, in terms of getting things from one another.

One observable clue to this attitude is in our modern usage of the word “get.” We live in a “getting” age: we get ahead, get an education, get married, get security and, if all fails, get psychiatry. We will even get books that will help us get things. There exists some doubt, however, as to whether books on conversing can help us get things faster. If they are not heeded, it is because modern methods of social, legal, and motivational clobbering are faster and more efficient.

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Until we have another motive for conversation than that of getting things from one another, until we are sufficiently freed from our perfectionist pictures of life to perceive real value in sharing talk as a means of sharing joy, securing release from fear, and of enlarging our sense of worth as individuals—in other words, until we learn to talk together as imperfectionists who want and need to get acquainted with the realities behind our pictures, we shall continue to be among the poorest communicators on earth.

A second problem is that of learning how to love a plain human being. Today, as during the Romantic movement, what we usually want unconsciously is a fancy human being with no flaws. When the mental picture we have of someone we love is colored by the wishes of childhood, we may love that picture rather than the real person behind it. Naturally, we are disappointed when the person we love does not conform to our picture. Since this kind of disappointment has no doubt happened to us before, one might suppose we would then tear up the picture and start all over. On the contrary we keep the picture and tear up the person. Small wonder that divorce courts are full of couples who never gave themselves a chance to know the real persons behind the pictures in their lives.

In both of these concerns—that of communicating and of learning how to love a plain human being—an imperfectionist attitude is necessary for the health of others. Sometimes I think it is no accident that the word love, from the Latin word *amor*, is close to the Greek word *amusso*, meaning “to choke.” Our need for an imperfectionist attitude could be said to be based on the fact that we cannot enjoy what we are perpetually choking in ourselves or others. One of the greatest gifts we can bestow on another person is to allow

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breathing room for that person's total psyche. When we refuse to provide room for that which does not harmonize with our picture of the perfect, we are takers of life in the name of love.

For precisely this reason, whenever a person has become sufficiently convinced of his imperfection to know that he does not understand life nor the human beings in it, he is apt to tear up some of the older notional pictures that cause people to choke other people and to replace them with a less dangerous set of attitudes.

In his new orientation, for example, the imperfectionist is likely to say that no two persons can be expected to feel alike about anything. This conclusion is not too startling until we apply the idea to love. For we have always found especially attractive the idea that two persons in love will feel the same. An imperfectionist is apt to tear up this picture quickly for he knows that it has produced more misery in life than ever it has achieved good. Some of Shelley's best poetry might never have been written had not his wife once exercised some of her own imperfectionism in time. This poet had lined his mind with a number of notions about perfect togetherness. One of them was the twin-soul conception, known to us more popularly as "two souls with but a single thought." As Shelley wrote:

*"We shall become the same, we shall be
One spirit within two frames. . . ."*

Which was all very well with her until, one day when Shelley was feeling miserable, he took her and the two children far out into the rough Bay of Spezzia in their yacht *Ariel*'s tiny basket-boat skiff. Suddenly, looking at his wife with wild, tortured eyes and clutching the gunwale franti-

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cally, he cried, "Now let us solve the great mystery!" It had not entered his picture-lined perfectionist mind that neither she nor the two children might share his wish that they drown themselves. Fortunately his wife, who did not feel the same, merely said: "Suppose we wait until after dinner." They rowed home peacefully, and I imagine she rowed.

One of man's most dangerous myths is contained in the notion that even if we cannot be perfect we still need perfection as a goal in life. There have been a thousand explanations as to why man has not reached perfection and yet we continue to smile indulgently at youthful dreams of perfect love, perfect success, and perfect happiness. In this imperfect world, where we are imperfectly conceived and born, imperfectly grow, build, love and die, we still remain convinced that the ideal of perfection will serve as a spur to our efforts. Moreover, since all that most people know about the perfectionist is that he is often the hardest working person around—that is to say, he is miserably "efficient" and lets everybody know it—they may grudgingly make a causal connection between perfectionism and progress in life.

Actually, progress usually turns out to be a result not of trying to be perfect but of trying to be better.

Occasionally, it is true, the perfectionist is nearly as efficient as he makes himself out to be. Most of the time, however, he is of all persons the least able in his life and work to approach excellence. If we could follow the perfectionist around, we would find that he regularly does two things that cut him off from growth and expansion in his field of work: firstly, he wastes energy making certain that the remarkable nature of his proficiency will be known; and, secondly, he takes care not to embark on any activity the successful outcome of which is at hazard. Only the person who knows he

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is not perfect, and knows he is not going to be perfect tomorrow, can risk the awkwardness and failure that may have to be more than whistlestops along his road to efficiency in living and in work.

Some of our greatest men were imperfectionists during the most productive years of their lives. Montaigne saw himself as a sedulous ape who learned slowly; Balzac was certain that "the hand of the novice" would forever be in his writings; and Shaw, who started out wanting to be a novelist, cheerfully noted that his first novel, *Immaturity*, which never sold and had to be stored in the attic, was finally devoured by mice and "even they couldn't finish it." Were these men fooling when they seemed to run themselves down? On the contrary, at such moments they were simply casting off old perfectionist attitudes so as to create an atmosphere more conducive to efficiency, and to enjoy an unpasteurized version of themselves peacefully. It is a golden moment in life for us, and for our friends, when we can accept the fact that our foolishness will never completely depart from us.

The dream of perfection and the quest for its attainment has comprised a major theme down through the ages. But I rejoice as each segment of that dream begins to release its hold upon our lives. If we can no longer aspire to be angels we may begin learning to be ourselves. When Gertrude Stein on her deathbed abruptly sat up and cried, "What is the answer?" and as suddenly lay back, she startled her relatives. But they were reassured it was the old imperfectionist Gertrude when she rose once more and said, "What was the question?"

It may be time for us to stop looking for final answers and start looking for the preliminary questions—the questions our beautiful, bungling selves want so badly to raise about one

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another. Admittedly, the imperfectionist way of looking at ourselves described in this book may make us do some startling things. When someone yells, "Hey, idiot!" we may turn around quickly. However, we may find also that our best friends are persons who would turn around too.

2.

Master Perfectionists and the One-eyed Man

UNTIL RECENTLY CONVERSATION HAD AN IMPORTANT function in our lives. It used to be that people sat out on the porch watching it grow dark and talking together. Even when they went inside they talked together. There were no dials to turn, no channels to flick, no rapid cars to take them to a wider screen. When people opened their doors to me they said "How are you?" as though they wanted to know how I was.

When those doors open today, however, and before I can open my mouth to speak, I am shushed with a warning that the television is on. After I have been led to my seat in front of that incomparable laundromat of the mind, a chill feeling comes over me: if I were to disappear into thin air I would never be missed until the television broke down.

One might suppose that our life in the home today is oriented around the idea of preventing contact with one another. So successfully have we made all our little electronic devices for easing ourselves separately through time that it

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is now possible to go the whole day without saying anything more personal than "please pass the toast." Granting that this new way of being "alone together" can be threatened by blown tubes or power shortages, our resources are still not exhausted. When conversation cannot be prevented, we have at our disposal certain ways of conversing without contact. These are Monologues in Duet, and, while they will be examined later in detail, let it suffice for now to say they serve us well as preventives of silence until the repair man for the television gets there.

Nobody in his senses, of course, wants the organs of speech to become atrophied since they are still needed for uttering pronouncements, asking for services, getting people to stand off our feet, and for complaining. Conversation, however, as a means of sharing what can be illuminated in ourselves when our own psychic channels are flicked from place to place, today threatens to disappear in favor of more desirable ways of spending our time.

Could it be that our beguilement with these means of avoiding contact is only a symptom of a deeper problem which we have yet to face? Surely this brainwasher is not alone responsible for making conversation seem unnecessary in our lives. Nor can we blame the pace of modern living for causing people to forsake what for thousands of years has been the chief means human beings have had for relating peacefully and pleasantly to one another. Although our homes today are becoming caves of silence and exhaustion in which electronic devices alone are capable of diverting us from our wall-to-wall anxieties, a more fundamental reason for this withdrawal from one another is not hard to find.

You may remember that we briefly characterized the perfectionist as a picture-straightener. To understand something of what is happening to conversation in our time, however,

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we shall need to look more closely at perfectionism itself. One's own perfectionism like a shadow behind him may be hard for him to see, but there are two classes of perfectionism observable in other people: the Masters and the Understudies. Master perfectionists are those who say they are not perfect but behave as though they had arrived at a flawless condition. Knowers before they're told, they sit with rapt inattention when others are talking and in general make us miserable because there is nothing we can give them, say to them, or blast them with that they do not know about already. Understudy perfectionists, on the other hand, know perfectly well that they are not perfect today but believe they are going to be perfect tomorrow. Driven by forces they little understand, impatient with today and the people in it, as well as under a strange urgency to bend all their energies toward tomorrow's day, these careening and nail-biting strivers are seldom able to show joyful recognition to what have become but dimly-remembered families to whom, in passing, they shout their love.

Whether Masters or Understudies, perfectionists are unfortunate, not merely because they are dissatisfied with life, but rather because under these terms of their persuasion they must continue to be dissatisfied. No improvement in conditions, no sudden bequests of fortune, no attainment of desire, no requital of hungers is likely to make any difference to them nor to affect for the better their relationships with other persons. If their outlook is colored by a Master perfectionist approach to life they may be satisfied with themselves but profoundly dissatisfied with life around them. The leading fact of significance is that they must continue stockpiling reasons why conditions around them are inferior to those they deserve. On the other hand, if their outlook is colored by an Understudy perfectionist's view of life they

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will scarcely be able to see conditions around them at all because they are self-involved, self-dissatisfied, and anxiously in pursuit of tomorrow. Their destiny is to go on being dissatisfied with themselves and with the fact that tomorrows never come. Bound by the terms of their outlook to experience future dissatisfaction, both Masters and Understudies would probably find Paradise lackluster.

With these perfectionist traits in mind while you observe what is happening to conversation in our world, simply look into a person's eyes when you are talking about yourself, and then look again when he is talking about himself. In all likelihood as you are talking about yourself, his eyes are glazed with boredom, and this disrelish will remain while he waits for you to finish—so that he can begin talking about himself. When his own moment to talk about his present or future self arrives, it is probable that his eyes will be filled with such light as comes to one in an ecstasy of religious observance. Otherwise expressed, when two such persons are talking we have in action the formula of a Monologue in Duet: you think up what you are going to say while he says what he thought up while you were talking.

Now this fine situation can be charged to human vanity and we can shrug it off by saying that everyone naturally likes to talk about himself, but the problem goes deeper. Our simple exercise in observation has brought us close to a major cause of our diminishing ability to converse together: chances are that either or both of these monologists are those effectual destroyers of communication in our midst—the Master perfectionists.

Consciously or not, the Master perfectionist in order to make his own picture of himself look straight must contrive to make yours look crooked. This he may achieve by finishing your sentences for you, by persuading you that you don't

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know what life is about, or by adopting postures of significant silence. When these fail he may create a situation in which he can enjoy, with ironic little smiles, what might be called the deliciousness of being misunderstood. Apart from these details, however, the most noteworthy thing about the Master perfectionist is that no matter how he describes himself—as imperfect, bewildered, unworthy or plain stupid—his behavior ultimately is that of a person who has arrived at perfect understanding and can learn no more.

What, then, has he to learn from you?

Let us be explicit: how many persons do you know, actually, who listen with absorption to your thoughts? Brace yourself next time you are with a companion, and look: you will readily perceive how swiftly his eyes stray to watches, cufflinks, windows, unshut doors, or people at the next table. If he is unskilled in the finer deceptions of life, your companion will soon commence to tap his fingers—an action which no man, by the way, will perform when he is talking about himself. On the other hand, he may be highly skilled as an artist in feigning absorption. In this case, to assess properly the measure of his rapt inattention you will have to pay close attention to learn whether or not what you say is being matched properly by the rhythm of his Nodding-fondly Mechanism. This is the device by which your companion nods fondly as though in understanding, although the fact of the matter is that he is nodding in slumber.

A Master perfectionist is also effective in scaring people off. Not that he consciously wishes by his devices to undermine good talk or to reduce the American home to a mausoleum in which the only radiant thing is the heating. On the contrary, he is prepared to listen to good sense if anybody is ready to talk it. But he creates so much anxiety around him by his fidgeting, tapping of fingers, glancing at watches,

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sighing into hypothetical distances, and by the general effect of his glazed eye that no one in his presence could talk sense if he tried.

Since these devices for creating anxiety and stupefaction around him usually succeed, the Master perfectionist has soon found grounds for saying as he departs: "All people are fools—they don't make sense." Until they do, he sees no reason for sitting around listening to them. "After all," he concludes, "if I really want to find out something I can see with my own two eyes."

Taken all in all, it would seem that Master perfectionists are of all people the least drawn to the idea of sharing. Since they feel that whatever they are being told they can see better with their "own two eyes," they find conversation exhausting. Weariness often sits in their features when loved ones ask them, for the sake of intimacy or "closeness," to become confidential and air their own human doubts and uncertainties. For they have never aired these things to themselves. Moreover they cannot see the sense of wasting talk: why should they lean forward with enthusiasm and ask questions to which the answers are obvious already? Since they see themselves as their own masters, it is unthinkable for them, and therefore stupid for other people, to waste words in an effort to secure joy, solace, consolation, understanding, or help.

These Masters who block the exchange of ideas on the score that they know things already are not a new phenomenon in our world. Nearly 2500 years ago Socrates was fascinated by the Master perfectionists of his own day who behaved as though they saw everything clearly with their own two eyes. His conviction that the grand illusion of life is that of seeing well led Socrates to do some strange things. One of them was to go around at the height of his

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reputation for wisdom calling himself the “one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind.” Who, then, were the blind? These were the Master perfectionists who could see with their “own two eyes” for they saw nothing, and saw not the depths of their own ignorance.

What set Socrates apart from other arguers under the shadow of the Parthenon was his daily effort to reveal to people how poorly they understood anything, and then how much better they would get along together once they acknowledged their ignorance peacefully and began to ask questions. When some people were caused to stumble so abrasively over their own ignorance that they went off saying, “That confounded Socrates!” he was not unhappy, because of his pervasive belief that for them an imperfectionist life would be better. To listen to the words of his contemporaries, many agreed with him. The Athenians seem to have romped their philosophy even more than talked it; and in love, laughter, strophe, and Pentelic marble they explained, without thought as to what later ages would say about it, their conviction that to be humanly imperfect was to be divine enough.

Socrates was quite imperfect himself. Even the hazy glimpses of him derived from Xenophon, Plato, and the careless Alexandrine biographers suggest that Socrates was not the sort of person most people would invite to dinner a second time. Ordinarily in today’s history books we hear about this side of Socrates little more than the story of his peevish refusal to wear the one pair of shoes we know he had. Instead, we hear only about the nastiness of Xantippe, the wife whom hearsayists have credited with alarming acts against his person—her propensity, for instance, to pour buckets of water over his head, tear his one bedsheet garment off in public places, and yank him home by the ear as he was saying

ngs that future American college students would need to
ow for their midterms. When he was soaked down in this
inner with Xantippe's bucket, Socrates used to say that he
urred her for discipline, since if he could put up with her
could put up with anything. For all we know, however—
d we have only the male side of the story—Xantippe may
ve put her own story eloquently. Her assaults with bucket
d broom may have been her compensation for having to
it up with Socrates and his trying habits: his insistence on
ing modern dance at home for exercise, his custom of
uling home without notice such dog-fighting, peace-dis-
rbing, silver-snatching friends as Alcibiades. She may have
d patience neither with his peaceful attitude toward his
vn imperfections, nor with his peculiar thought, on taking up
ite-playing in his seventieth year, that he wanted to learn
play “but not too well.” She may have wondered what
ocrates was trying to prove and why he was so casual about
fe.

Whatever his attitude toward flute-playing, shoes, and
antippe's bucket, Socrates was not casual about the habits
f Master perfectionists in Athens. He had these joy-spoilers
1 mind when he brought philosophy into the market place
mong fishermen, cart-pushers, brass-founders and skin-dress-
rs. Using the simple slang and trade jargon of these people,
ocrates in his questions invited people to guess that the
traight-thinking, clear-seeing, and right-acting Masters of
erfection were the greatest cripplers of life. Not only were
hey blind to everything in them and around them, they
ould not even see their need to examine the life they had.
“And life unexamined,” he added, “is not worth living.”

When we wonder after all these centuries what Socrates
neant by “examining” life, our own perfectionism may
quickly cause us to slide past this phrase and take up another

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one of which we are much more fond—the phrase he lifted from the Temple of Delphi: “Know thyself.” If we have preferred to associate this thought with Socrates, this is perhaps because we can associate it more easily with ourselves and our friends. Whether applied to other people as a flail or to ourselves in congratulation, it can be useful, and we can also take it to mean: “Know thy virtues, thy talents and such little flaws as thou canst acknowledge without marring thy good picture of thyself.”

From the evidence, however, it would appear that Socrates had something less flattering in mind. As he tried to make abundantly clear, self-knowledge has nothing to do with self-congratulation: it has everything to do with the acknowledgment of our frailties and especially of our ignorance. “Know thyself” means simply “Know thy ignorance” and *behave* as though you know. In his deliberate emphasis on action, Socrates seems to have wanted people to acknowledge the ignorance they found in two devastating, humiliating ways: publicly to others, and privately to themselves. Why must people take this flail upon their own shoulders? Because, in Socrates’ own words: “The evil of ignorance is that he who is neither wise nor good is nevertheless satisfied with himself.” So pervasive is this deadly self-satisfaction that it can be dispelled only by habits of acknowledging our frailties and of behaving with them in mind. That human beings are in no condition to look around them profitably or to be of much use to society until they have exercised these two habits was perhaps the essence of his teaching.

Seldom since those days have we taken this idea of Socrates seriously: that “examining life” has something to do with examining our own self-satisfaction. We began this chapter by saying that Master perfectionists in their assumption of perfect understanding have wreaked havoc with the

communication process in the American home. The depredations of this deadly self-satisfaction in the larger world of international relations have been more numerous and costly than could be described within these pages—and much of it would be disbelief. It may seem strange to us today, lodged in an age that has reached the highest point of technical achievement in history, that we may need to concern ourselves all over again with one of the earliest problems to occupy the mind of primitive man—the problem of being understood when we talk. Stranger yet is the suspicion that perhaps primitive man was able to communicate in some ways better than we do. There is a still stranger suspicion: that we human beings, alone among all creatures of the world, have learned to talk in ways that prevent communication. Of our words we have for a long time made barricades to protect our perfectionist pictures, to prevent access to one another, and to hide evidence in order to win the battle over who is right and who is wrong. These barricades through the centuries have grown so high that now, in our age of nuclear fission, there would no longer seem to be a question of surmounting them but only of hoping to prevent them from causing us to achieve our own annihilation as a species.

What is a particular concern to us here is not simply that civilized man has been obstructing his own process of communication but that he has been obstructing it in ways characteristic of a perfectionist. Behind every effective exchange of ideas—whether between races, nations, religious or social groups—stands one *imperfectionist* assumption: that we need “assistance to understand.” When we communicate well, we are simply assisting others to understand us, as we would have them assist us in understanding them. It is hard to find a time in history when failure to make this assumption has

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been anything but costly to the people of the age. But unfortunately, as a glance into human habits of conversation, of making speeches, and of writing books will show, it is not the idea of "seeking assistance to understand" that has been foremost in consciousness. Consider that from Socrates in the fifth century B.C. to 1925 A.D., according to one tabulation, there were 967 international wars in the Graeco-Roman and Western world, as well as 1,623 civil wars. In these wars opponents understood each other perfectly: that is to say, as perfectly villainous. In these conflicts each side was always right. Each country made certain that persons within its borders stayed on the "right track" of belief. When several different countries were involved in a secular or religious war the number of "right tracks," right conceptions, and allegedly God-sponsored certainties that crowded onto the field might have been confusing. It never was. It was never necessary to ask the other side for more understanding.

While it is the custom of this day to rationalize failure to avoid conflict by saying one side was "right" and the other "wrong," some likelihood remains that many conflicts in history could have been prevented if discussions across the borders had not for a long time previously taken the form of Monologues in Duet, and if instead the participants had been willing to concede their own imperfect understanding and ask for assistance in understanding one another.

Nearly two thousand years after the death of Socrates by hemlock for having become the public nuisance of Greater Athens, another man tried to draw public attention to the interpersonal and social havoc produced by self-satisfaction. What Francis Bacon suggested as a corrective was this: "We must renounce for a while our notions and begin to form an acquaintance with things." But this, again, was not popular with the perfectionists. Behind them stood all the accumu-

lated "wisdom" of the ancients and all the precision-made "truths" of the medieval world. That Bacon wanted people to renounce all this and start all over was surely presumptuous—like admitting we can't see the truth of the world with our own two eyes.

But Francis Bacon, to make it worse, was not even certain how rapidly we would get ahead as communicators in our world if we did start all over. It might take a while because our very words had become barriers between us and "there arises from a bad, unapt use of language a wonderful obstruction to the mind." As though this were not enough, he added that the human mind itself seems to be an imperfect instrument, and "resembles those uneven mirrors which impart their own properties to different objects." In other words, everything we hear and say has at least two chances to be distorted.

If people love the "truth" and if Bacon spoke truth, we might suppose that his truth would have made a difference and influenced more people to examine life by beginning to examine their own uneven mirror. But we find little evidence of this. Such imperfectionists as Socrates and Bacon have always been outshouted by the millions of Master perfectionists who "know" without asking and who, from an odd sense of original entitlement to good sense, feel that any inquiry into their own processes is unnecessary.

Many people agree, now that dogs are in the sky, that it would be a good thing if we could apply the principle of "seeking assistance to understand" to the problems of international conflict; not so many believe in applying the same principle to the task of removing our own self-satisfaction at home. Ignorant of all that we lose by not applying ourselves in school and later homelife to a shared study of the history, customs, attitudes, joys and hurts of European and Asiatic

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peoples, we are not really interested in them; and consequently many of our good-will gestures across the oceans soon reveal our Nodding-fondly Mechanism and are not really to be believed. Somehow since the age of Romanticism it has seemed easier to feel moods of love and helpfulness toward other peoples if we can keep them at a distance and don't have to learn too much about the details of their lives, which probably explains why a humanitarian was once defined as a person who loves humanity but hates people. If it be true that our concern for other peoples of the earth seldom turns out to be more than a sentimental singing commercial not backed by any solid effort to understand them in their own setting, this may be because we have not had much practice in bridging differences by "seeking assistance to understand" in our own homes.

Not impossibly, if we and our children are going to be of much use to society at large, we still have much to learn at home from the one-eyed man of Athens who said that perfectionism gets you nowhere. We may need to jolt our vanity by agreeing with Socrates that ability to keep and enjoy our own relationships may to a great extent depend on our behaving as though we are poor observers. Even if we are not Master perfectionists, and therefore blind to the problem, we will at best never be more than one-eyed men; and because our perception and our perspective are forever limited, we will be charged with a lifelong need to ask questions. Our condition compels us to ask for help. In short, the terms of our human survival as one-eyed creatures are that we are obliged to share our eyes.

Have we actually learned to share our eyes? On the contrary, we have usually been advised not to show our ignorance. Moreover, it is understandable that we may have been building up for years at great expense to our fellow creatures

the opposite tendency: the air of knowing before we're told. Somewhere we may have subscribed to the myth that if we seem perfectly sure of ourselves, perfectly successful as we are, and perfectly independent of the need to ask anything, we shall be admired and loved for these sterling virtues. Only by refraining from exhibiting the holes in our psychic shoes will we get on. May I create a little story to call this theory into question?

Once there was a king who desired the hand and other portions of a visiting princess and in order to win all these he said unto her: "I am the Emperor of all Christendom." But she was not impressed nor did she move toward him with unction of love. He came closer then, and said: "Thousands of people move at my bidding." And still her smile did not inflame his hopes. With exasperation, leaning above her he cried: "Kings and emperors envy me my throne! Does this not move thee, child?" And yet she remained unmoved nor did she smile upon him.

Now he languished. Sinking into his throne seat with weariness he said: "This is the way with me these days. You know, I did a bunch of stupid things even from this throne today; and, besides, my feet hurt." Slowly her smile fell upon him, warm and acquiescent in all he wished.

Try as we may to build a flawless version of ourselves it serves us not so well in our relations as do those imperfections that appear around the edges by which others can identify with us. We cannot draw people in to love us if we seem too strong to need them in. On the contrary, when we cheerfully assist people to understand us as we are, we enable them in turn to take heart in their own flawed nature. In this sense imperfectionism is a way of coming down from our tower of fear, of coming down to be understood, of coming down to give other people a chance to love us.

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As we look back upon history's challenges to open the doors to communication so long held shut by the perfectionists we may feel it is no small order to expect modern people to make such concessions as Bacon had in mind. Most of us have come of age with the principle firmly fixed in mind: don't show your ignorance. This too we realize: with all our traditional ideas of the perfect that have helped form us as human beings-about-to-be-divine, it is understandable that there are today many bloody but unbowed Henleys who cannot face the fact they are not captains of their souls. Having once denied the existence of evil (or ignorance) within themselves they cannot risk participation in situations where either might be disclosed. Granted, a great philosopher like Socrates living in a society far simpler than ours may have managed to show his ignorance and to risk cheerfully the disclosure of his flaws; but we are left nevertheless with the most practical of questions: where could we hope to find such people today?

Since Socrates found it useful to draw his examples from fishermen, let us do so again. Very soon now, when I take my sailing ship *Panacea* into drydock, a few of the several hundred deep-sea fishermen of San Diego will have their little ships in drydock cradles near mine. As quickly as these craft have come out of the water and while the hulls are still dripping, the fishermen will fall to jabbing the planks with putty knives and chisels to check for seams that have opened and search for teredos and other wood-borers. Sometimes within the hour they will have done an even stranger thing: they will have cut away part of their ship. In removing a sizeable and costly section of worm-infested or dry-rotted wood clean down to the garboard strake they are sick at heart, of course, but glad they found the trouble when they did. For today, as in Socrates' time, the fisherman is an im-

perfectionist. By the nature of his trade he must search for trouble today and expect trouble tomorrow; it cannot be otherwise. He places his faith in an imperfect boat that moves in an impartial sea. He searches for trouble because, simply, he knows that the security of his little ship depends not upon the perfect gloss of its paint but rather upon pretty healthy wood and well-packed cotton in the seams.

Why cannot we do this with ourselves? Because we are not supposed to be flawed, whence comes our strange notion, "Leave well enough alone." Go back into the stream quickly and sail into the sunset reading *Peace of Mind*, but don't examine the seams! We must not have a haulout and sit there bare and exposed in the drydock cradle, for then we've taken away everything. We've taken away our illusions.

Perhaps a crucial reason why today's Master perfectionist withdraws from other people in the home is that, unlike the boatman who digs for his trouble, he has withdrawn from drydock procedures in his own life. Since his theory of perfection depends upon his not discovering the borers and not acknowledging that he is a human boat with seams that open, he cannot expose himself in the drydock cradle where unpleasant conditions might become known. How, then, can he afford to expose himself to closer contact with other people?

A surprising share of inability to talk together springs from unwillingness to take the risk of being found wanting. Some persons, for example, are easily affronted. So carefully have they arranged their surroundings so as not to bruise their conception of themselves as possessors of perfect character that a sudden wisecrack or seeming insult will make them withdraw at once from the source of the disturbance and not come back. No matter that below the threshold of con-

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sciousness we may secretly know the facts, we will not allow them into consciousness. We still don't want them to break to the surface. For example, there are these delightful lines in Shaw's *Man and Superman*: "The death of anyone we know, even those we liked best, was always mingled with a certain satisfaction at being finally done with them." This usually brings a burst of laughter—from recognition: for we have felt this ourselves, although we would not allow it into consciousness.

Among other ways of avoiding confrontation of our own flaws is that of becoming authorities on the frailties of other people. Often the Master perfectionist, for instance, will deal with what he has denied in himself by discovering the same flaw in his friends. He looks to his newspapers, magazines, movies, as well as his friends and associates, not merely for pleasant diversion but also in order to locate and stockpile into the unconscious a handy menagerie of villains on whom to hang the labels of villainy, and thus by invidious comparison to himself preserve that unblemished appearance which his perfectionism demands.

However hard we may strive in these ways to avoid the disclosure of ourselves, the cost of maintaining a Master perfectionist view of life is high. Seldom is it realized, for instance, that by our refusal to take the risks of being found wanting we are cutting ourselves off from growth. So expertly may we withdraw from risks that life cannot reach us. When this happens we lose the excitement of venturing into new fields, the joy of experiencing new sensations, of risking the contact with new personalities. Because we have denied our shadow of faults, there is nothing for us to become; because we have piled up the evidence against other people, we cannot love them. With our energies dissipated in the effort to protect an indefensible picture of ourselves we are

perennially alone on the field of life, with an "on the mark, get set" attitude but really nowhere to go. Most of us remember the remark of Emerson's about hitching your wagon to a star. By this he meant that if you hitch your energies to a cause, an idea, it will take you places—the star will impart to you something of its power. No one can hitch himself to a star, however, if his Master perfectionism requires that he be the star himself.

Some years ago, for example, I used to gather a group of professors aboard my little ship each week hoping for a beneficial exchange of ideas. Unfortunately we were getting nowhere. This was because each one of us seemed too anxious to perpetuate, by frequent significant silences and short, erudite remarks and a general exercise of the Nodding-fondly Mechanism, the myth of knowing his field. Talk was sporadic and the air was heavy, as though we were mutually afraid of one another—afraid of being found out, afraid that someone there would stockpile the evidence of our personal ineptitude that he could subsequently pass along to eager associates. That we were sitting together at all was beginning to be ludicrous because nobody was asking anything of his neighbor.

After everyone else had gone one evening, I was commiserating with myself over this state of affairs and thinking how much these men had to offer. Here was Professor X, who had written a number of shrewdly documented books on recent history, and, near the galley entrance, there always sat Professor Y, whose absorption in archaeology had often carried him around the world; Doctor Z was a competent psychologist of the Carl Rogers persuasion, who had much to say if ever I could get him over his client-centered silence. Then suddenly I had an answer: we were in trouble *because* we had much to say but nothing to hear.

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Next time we met I suggested we call our association "The Ignorance Club" with the general idea that each of us as he came aboard was quietly to say to himself "I am ignorant" and then behave that way belowdecks by asking some of the "stupid" questions to which he had always privately wanted answers. Our next discussion took an extraordinary turn as our questions—"What was Freud really up to?" "You know, I never did get it straight about 1066. How did it happen?"—began to provoke delighted answers. No one was trying to be first in intellect. Our decision to behave like the one-eyed men we were established among us all a relatedness—not on the basis of our perfect wisdom but on the basis of our revealed ignorance. And this was just as well. We can never be first, it seems, without an elaborate backdrop of self-deception.

Alone later that night in the main salon over a final coffee, I was watching the swaying of gimballed lanterns that told of the ship's movement, when suddenly everything around me began moving in rhythmic dance. A passing ship had set my surroundings in motion. As the reflections from swinging brass lanterns ran over the bulkheads and the books, I thought about the "stability curves" by which computations a captain knows how far his ship can roll—as a healthy ship must to make its way—before it is in danger of rolling over. Another reason, perhaps, why we had been so miserable before we called ourselves an Ignorance Club was that we had forgotten about our own stability curves. A healthy person can roll a great deal with safety in the waves that come from life and from other people's ideas before he needs to worry about losing his equilibrium.

Because Master perfectionists cannot yield the stationary attitudes they have set for themselves they simply cannot dance in the embrace of moving water, and their whole

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nervous system must fight against the acknowledgment that they are at sea.

Our human joy of sharing may depend on ability to drop this insistence upon a stationary attitude and find our equilibrium in a new way: in peaceful acceptance of the fact that no matter how we seek to structure our lives and our thoughts we will always be at sea. Symbols for this fact are all around us in nature. Even on the seemingly solid ground of our world there is a continual movement that renders absurd man's claim to have arrived at a stationary condition of perfection. As though to mock his rigid way, the trees move to the deepest reach of their secret roots; under his narrow shoes the slow ballet of the sands moves from sea-floor to dune and back again; and with his feet man clings to a dancing planet whose pirouette is only an incident in the choreography of the stars.

3.

Do You Suffer from Shoulditis?

ALTHOUGH SOME PERFECTIONISTS CANNOT ADMIT their ignorance, there are others who can. One day, for instance, I was getting out of my car in front of a woman's club where I was scheduled to speak when suddenly my hand was seized by a woman in a planetary hat. She had been running all the way down the clubhouse steps.

"I'm glad you're here," she cried. "Aren't you petrified?"

I cleared my throat uncertainly, having just come from giving a talk on Egyptian mummies, and pressed her hand by way of showing her I was not.

"Well, I am," she said, leading me rapidly into the woman's-club auditorium and making me sit down. "This," she whispered, her hat tilting tremulously, "is my first day as program chairman and I don't know what to say when I introduce you. I wrote something," she added, plunging here and there in the recesses of her purse until she found a small paper. Hastily turning it this way and that, she read me what it said and then looked at me in delicate desperation.

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“That’s fine,” I said, “but it’s about John Morley.” She looked at me fixedly. “Aren’t you John Morley?” I shook my head.

“You see what I mean?” she said. “If it just weren’t my first day—but never mind. I’ve got you somewhere else in my things. I’ll go find you, and you stay here. It won’t be for a while and you can enjoy the business meeting.”

Alone now, hatless in a moving sea of millinery, I fumbled for my notes as though looking for a sign that could tell me who I was. Just then, from the row ahead of me, I heard two women whispering and one mentioned my name. With the ecstasy of a man reborn I leaned forward hungrily to hear.

“I hope this Clarke is funny and doesn’t talk too long,” said one.

“He may be a bore,” said the other, “but I find if I loosen my girdle a bit, these speakers aren’t so bad.”

Possibly because of something in my talk that day, the program chairman indicated she wanted to have some further words with me. After everyone else had eaten all the little cakes and gone away, she sat me down and led me to understand, in that wonderfully delicately-gloved indirection some women have, that her social activities were not understood at home. Only yesterday, having lost the presidency of another club because of factions within, and in a manner that jeopardized all her social plans for the year, she had gone home only to find her husband and children quarrelsome and unsympathetic. She had never been so miserable. Actually, as her husband and children could doubtless have testified, she had been miserable all along.

She was an Understudy perfectionist, one of those anxious strivers who should be and are going to be perfect tomorrow, and who, because they are chronically dissatisfied with the hour at hand, are never really with you today. At her dinner

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table that night I would still be John Morley. Like most Understudies careening toward tomorrow and impatient with today, she would go on getting today's details wrong, for she couldn't be in two places at once.

Sitting with dark prescription glasses in one of the major television network offices in Hollywood was a decrepit octogenarian who, at the chronological age of thirty-two, was an object of fear to a number of people whose survival in the studios depended upon his moods. When a nationwide show you've all seen was video-taped each week, there would be a frightening hour for everyone when he came into the central "mixing" control room and took his chair. In a weird blue flickering illumination of six television screens and of tiny red lights, he sat tensely and ominously, an electronic emperor with ulcers. Everything appeared to exist for him. Several miles away in Tarzana existed the wife he remembered marrying. Below him, on a vast stage, under a hundred arc lights of various sizes and peculiarities, existed for him the expendable moving figures, important only for their usefulness in his design for tomorrow's success; his \$3,000 a week salary check, still uncashed in his wallet, existed for him only as a monetary whistlestop along the way to a greater financial destination toward which his whole nervous system propelled him.

Whether found in homes, clubs or executive offices, most of these anxious strivers who render today miserable for the sake of tomorrow are suffering from Shoulditis: hyperanxiety over what they *should* do, with a corollary nosiness concerning what others should do.

From birth to death our little life is surrounded by injunctions, advice, warnings, and desire-kindling motivational pulls toward what we should do with ourselves tomorrow. These urgencies of the "should" may start in early childhood

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and produce what later flowers into an anxious striving for tomorrow's perfection—often in a direction having no actual relation to the individual's own actual gifts or fundamental desires. Sometimes, for example, the child may have been so successfully motivated in school with the currently fostered idea that he should be inconspicuous in order to reach a state of perfect belonging, that he comes to age with little incentive to be himself. And later, perfectly acceptable as an adult in his community, he suffers from that peculiarly exhausting disrelish for today which is observable in people who have never emerged from the psychic placenta of the "should" in time to determine the nature of their own wants.

There is in human history a surprisingly long, macabre chain of cause and effect that has clanked into our living rooms today to make Joe declare, "I am not perfect, but . . ." and then at once proceed to wreck his health and deaden his human relationships for the sake of later bliss. Like the Master perfectionists we scrutinized previously, Joe as an Understudy is usually involved more than he realizes with the past. His problem, when he is beyond listening to family or medical adjurations, is that he is under the tyranny of the "should," and this tyranny is often far older and more powerful than his family or his doctor. Sometimes it is not enough to say that causes of perfectionism in our society are due to childhood phantasies, traumas, frustrations, and the subliminally motivating pulls of the modern myths as to what constitutes success and happiness. The causes may have to be sought farther back in the long childhood of the human race. Unknown to himself, the Understudy perfectionist is often being pulled, pushed, and otherwise emotionally induced toward perfection by any of a number of hand-me-down pictures of the perfect from long ago.

One of the great Shoulditis epidemics of the past, whose

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effects on our lives still linger today to create Understudy perfectionists of all sizes, shapes, and peculiarities, grew up in the eighteenth century around the idea of being perfectly natural. Millions of people, weary of the sickly artificiality they had been told by Rousseau was at the root of their customs, attitudes, and modes of living, began to rush out of their houses and go back to nature. Civilization, they were made to feel, was only a disease which could be cured by exposure to perfectly natural places and by contact with perfectly natural people. The former were not easy to reach, for they were too far away—places like Tahiti, Alaska, certain natural habitats of the American Indians, as well as certain habitats of unspoiled man in the past, among which were medieval castles, moldering churches, and impenetrable woods in which one could imagine the spirits of the old world still held suggestive powers. But some of these perfect places could be re-created, and were, in England and on the Continent, simply by constructing primitive woods, erecting structures and then knocking them down to make old ruins, and otherwise creating perfect places where one could, by sullenly in the convenient wildwoods of the outer grounds where one lived, become perfectly natural without soilage to shoes or taffetas. Similarly, perfect people were hard to find since they were known to exist only in uncivilized places; but a number of noble savages, such as the famous Omai, were actually brought from afar and shown in drawing rooms at great expense to the furniture in order that people might touch them and be influenced by their perfect naturalness.

In consequence of all these activities to conform to the shoulds of the naturists, there were thousands of unhappy people sitting where they didn't really want to sit, adopting a "natural" dishevelment that was not to their taste, and plunging into the rainy woods with others who, like them-

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selves, had the truth been sought, would much rather have stayed at home. Their unhappiness they attributed to Dr. Chain's disease of hypochondria, then fashionably known as the "Hyp," but most of them were sufferers from the general sort of Shoulditis that Bernard Shaw must have had in mind when he said, "An Englishman thinks he is moral when he is only uncomfortable."

Often the inherited "shoulds" that motivate us today are more harmful than was the discomfiture once produced by trying to conform to another's theory of the natural. Other goals of appropriateness that have come down the centuries to influence today's strivings are often expressed as follows: you should be perfectly happy; you should have a perfect marriage; you should be financially successful at your age; you should be content to lie in the bed you made; you should be perfectly understanding of others; you should follow the pattern of life I have set down for you. Each one of these admonitions, as we shall have reason to see in later chapters of this book, holds far more power to stunt growth, hamper human relations, and foster guilt from failure to perform than the good intentions of chorusing advisers would ever suggest.

How easily what we want can become buried under what we "should" do! When for the first time I moved aboard my sailing ship in San Francisco bay, years ago, I was invited to believe that above all I should be a perfect host. With this sense of obligation in mind I told my friends to come down any time and bring their friends. They did. In those days I foolishly used to leave the ship open, and it was not long before I found myself coming home to find a number of people already settled contentedly below as though to spend the night. When I returned home one night to find eighteen persons below having a party that extended from the main

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salon through the two staterooms to the fo'c'sle, and one of my unknown guests looked up challengingly at my approach and said, "Who are you?" I decided it was time to become an imperfect host. From then on I let everybody know about my peculiar nature: that sometimes I liked to write alone, read alone, and just sit alone. Unless they telephoned before they came down, my peculiarity would probably force me to ignore their call from the dock. It had taken me a long time to learn that you do not have to live up to other people's versions of the perfect.

The great danger of Shoulditis is that we may exhaust half a lifetime in pursuit of others' "shoulds" before slowing down to consider the nature of our own "wants." One central trouble in the life of the Understudy perfectionist derives not at all from his failure to do what he should: it derives from the fact that he *is* doing what he should. His own want, based on the claims of his own human uniqueness, has been buried too long under the should.

Near where I write, high above in the Point Loma hills, live several physicians of my acquaintance who have rather extensive homes and grounds. One of them, whom we shall call Dr. X, was for many years disturbed by unwanted traits he noticed in himself. Among them was a certain abruptness with patients who wanted to talk about their emotional problems. Another was a tendency he discovered in himself to think more often of lucrative surgery than of less expensive, and often just as helpful, measures. These characteristics not only depressed him, they exhausted much of his energies in constant vigilance, thus far successful, to prevent himself from falling into the ruthlessness toward which his thoughts were leading him.

When I came to know him, he had after long years discovered something forgotten in his own past and was then

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solving his own problem in an unusual way. He moved himself and family aboard a small sailing ship in the harbor and could often be found there on the stern deck fishing. His father, a successful surgeon whom he feared and respected and whose perfectly controlled countenance never invited discussion, had created a certain wordless atmosphere in the house that anyone could decipher: the son *should* follow in his father's profession. Once his father had turned to him and said, "Of course, you don't really need to do what I have done." But the words meant *nothing*. Written into that father's face and etched on every wall was "You should!" Only many years later, after grueling years of building a practice, did the now successful son rediscover the truth: he had never wanted to be a doctor.

What Dr. X could not handle, once he had made this rediscovery, was the thought of changing professions at this stage of life; but he did the next best thing. He recalled what he had always really wanted to do, and set about doing it on the side. His desire, a low one indeed on the conventional totem poles of American life, had been to be a fisherman. The simple expedient of bringing this segment of his buried want into action began to produce two surprising consequences: he was released from the tyranny of the should in time to begin liking his patients; and he began to discover with his wife a love that had lain dormant for years under a pile of bills and social notices.

Not everyone can change his profession. Almost anyone, however, can find grounds for liking what he does by the simple expedient of living part of his life in terms of his own basic wants. They may not be to the taste of others; they may produce some unpleasant reactions from associates and neighbors. Far more unpleasant, however, is the havoc wrought in others and upon ourselves when we are living out

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another person's version of the worthwhile life. Not a few of the neuroses of our time are due to the toxic effect of a completely mechanical labor carried on by people who are doing things out of unscrutinized duty that they were never originally excited into doing out of love.

In mild forms, Shoulditis can be produced in most of us from an understandable wish to get along with other people. Moreover, the word "should" covers many personal and social obligations in our society. We may feel obliged to remain obedient to a parent's preferences of conduct as a means of expressing our love and respect. Social "shoulds" of various kinds also figure in everyday life—we should not, for example, exhibit loud temper in public, stand up to disagree with the minister in church, or walk over people's possessions on the beach. To these understandable curbs on ourselves, however, are added another variety that does not spring from thoughtfulness to others so much as from prudence and custom. Earlier we discussed, for instance, the custom of not showing our ignorance. We seem also to have come of age with a sort of acquired cunning that tells us we should not show ourselves. We learn from better business not to show our hand, and from frowning custom not to show our bodies. We further learn, as we go along, not to show our faces. Whenever we go out among our acquaintances we clothe our faces as we did our bodies as best we can with the appropriate attire of expressions. How quickly these fall away when we are alone! One glance around you in a darkened theater, and in the reflected light of the screen you will see truly naked faces that are not easily forgotten. They contain all the yearnings and fears common to us all, which we have learned not to show. To see such faces is to be grateful that we have learned not to trouble the air and frighten people with our faces.

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But Shoulditis does not stop here. Whether motivated by kindness, prudence, or a wish not to prove offensive to custom, there is growing evidence in our society that we are, in the name of the should, unwittingly neglecting the claims of individual life. Often we are unaware of the tyranny of the "should" in our own words. Mark Van Doren, in a recent article in the *Saturday Review*, declared, "Too seldom, as one people, as one race, do we ask ourselves the tough question man has always been faced with: who are we, what are we, and what should we desire?" Here the seemingly innocuous word "should" was at work, unintentionally, undermining the real toughness, which could be found only in a prior question: "What *do* I desire?" This question we avoid. By assuming that any answer we could give must be somehow selfish and unworthy, we render unsubstantial the structures we build with our ideals, because we have left out altogether the cornerstone of desire. Thus again the perfectionism of which we are unconscious works to hamper our joy in living. No wonder that the fruit of our quest for understanding is confusion rather than clarification, and anxiety instead of peace. When Socrates called himself "the one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind," he could not know the extent to which we, in our later age, would compound that natural poorness of perception to which we are heir with an unnatural blindness produced in our lives by the tyranny of the "should." We are so terribly afraid of placing our naked feet on the ground of life, afraid lest they be not proper feet, and more afraid that the ground be not proper ground. Until we learn to look unabashedly for the "want," we are withheld from achieving a state of mental well-being in which to perform the duties to others we may then feel worthwhile.

How business thrives on manipulation of the "should" has

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recently been the subject of various studies, and yet the great unanswered question remains: What is it in us that permits us to go on buying things we don't want in order to keep up with the Joneses who don't want them either? How can it be, in consequence of this successful advertising, that we have today a whole army of people in the psychiatrists' offices who hate themselves because they can't get what the advertisers want them to want? If they recover from their Shoulditis they will still be exposed to little guilt-making digs at their status like the one conveyed by the door-to-door salesman who said, "Now here is the little item your neighbors said you can't afford." This hits all of us, no matter where we are.

Nearly twenty miles at sea one day, I was cooking breakfast on the galley stove, when from the radio the announcer's dulcet voice came to me with these words: "Is *your* funny old kitchen range the subject of neighborhood gossip?" Have the manipulators our key? When the final accounting of our age is given, will it be found that we unreflectingly yielded up our joy, our individual daring, and our delight in one another to a time-planned world of outmoded-before-you-pay-as-you-go gadgets? That we really equated higher tailfins with happiness? That, having lost our tongues, we went forth confidently in our automobiles like dreaming vegetables nestled in chrome? Will it be found that the final victim of planned obsolescence was ourselves?

Surely it would seem, from all the evidence of our vulnerability that has emerged in these recent years, that we have something more important to study in our schools than advanced cake decoration. We may even need to stop passing judgment for a while, as perfectionists, to learn whether we as poor driven things have any judgment to pass.

We know that the Greeks, under the democracy of Pericles

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nearly twenty-five hundred years ago, were curiously anxious to hear all sides of a question. They used to boo the one-sided orator from the high spots of the agora, for they were anxious not to be robbed of their judgment by tricks. Significantly, it was clearer to them than to us that man's power to judge is very frail, and that he can be robbed of it—especially when, as a perfectionist, he says he cannot be.

Here the Athenians suggest one of the basic reasons why we in our time can be so effectually manipulated: we have been, for such a long time now, so insidiously robbed of our judgment that we can listen now only to the emotion-sound of words. Modern advertising is based, essentially, on the exploitation of the emotional aspect of words at the expense of our dwindling ability to judge. In the hurried competition to sell products, advertisers have resorted to becoming fear-makers where there is nothing to fear, and delight-makers where there is nothing delightful. They have further habituated us to the emotion-sound of words in order to create new cravings and hatreds, and the habituation has even further deadened our judgment. Who of us is not, when surrounded by such words as "radiant," "delicate," and "soothing," prepared to admit that a toothpaste tube that is streamlined is somehow better? We hear that a "world-renowned Viennese specialist" has prepared the formula for our mouthwash. There must be such an overcrowding in Vienna of world-renowned Viennese specialists as not to leave room in that city for other persons, for they appear by the hour to endorse drugs, to make soap, to prepare food.

In this Year of Our Television hitherto meaningless words have been given an emotional connotation for millions of persons by the significance of tone with which they were uttered. From the moment Alka-Seltzer was known to contain an analgesic acido-salicylate, we had to have it immedi-

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ately. Something else had “irium.” Now we want it. Are we not led like the ass is led by the dangled carrot from the marketplace to the precipice? What is our own private precipice but that continual indebtedness for things we don’t need, continual fear of things in themselves not fearful, continual craving for things in themselves not desirable? What are the dangled carrots we follow but the words whose meanings our deadened judgment has not been aroused to examine?

Such progress in the deadening of our judgment has perhaps seemed justified for the sake of upholding the economy—and indeed, it is hard to know how American business could retain its tempo without the help of this mass-induced Shoulditis. There is, however, another reason than that of deadened judgment for our willingness to put up with it.

One basic characteristic of the Understudy perfectionist is his urgent feeling that he should get to the top. In consequence of this craving any lower position seems to him unworthy and in need of hiding. More and more, as he hurries toward tomorrow’s hoped-for achievement, spurred on by success-guidebooks and mass-media advertising layouts showing what success-symbols he must have upon arrival, more evidences of failure appear that must be hidden. The Understudy perfectionist becomes acutely sensitive to his failure to rise in a culture that has stressed upwardness. What is more, he will not be able to achieve his goal of arrival: he is condemned to be the sufferer. As Vance Packard points out in *The Status-Seekers*: “A person standing still in a culture that glorifies upward progress often suffers hurt.” Also, Packard adds, “We are consigning tens of millions of our people to fixed roles in life where aspiration is futile, and yet we keep telling them that those who have the stuff will rise to the top.” What follows, as Packard rightly concludes is a “frightful shattering of integrity.” Otherwise expressed,

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not only is the Understudy perfectionist consumed with need to hide mounting failures, he must also conceal a sense of growing chaos within himself. Only cleverness and unusual resourcefulness can help him, now, to make failure and chaos look like success.

Fortunately, whether he is clever or not, there exists for the Understudy perfectionist the most ingenious of all possible ways of concealing the conviction of failure: that of surrounding himself with symbols of perfect success. Thus far we have seen these symbols as a means of impressing others, but this only partly accounts, it would seem, for their fantastic clutter in our lives. An equally potent source of our efforts to surround ourselves with longer cars, wider screens, more radiant heating, and more wall-to-wall carpeting with its accompanying wall-to-wall problem of payment, has to do with an intensely personal, almost religious, animistic feeling about their power to help us put ourselves together. If only we can live in a perfect house, drive a perfect automobile, if we can hitch ourselves to all the electronic stars in a gadget heaven, we will partake of their power and somehow feel better about ourselves.

A strong belief that people could be persuaded to feel they "should" feel a certain way has given rise to a remarkable segment within advertising that might be called the "Echo Industry." Simply expressed, it has to do with professional assistance to us in the drawing of conclusions about life. We either reach conclusions or we echo conclusions. Reaching conclusions is usually difficult in human life and is especially so now. Since we have been robbed of our judgment, lost our tongues, and have had to prevent the horrible silence in our houses by surrounding our lives with carefully prepared and paid-for noise, the atmosphere is still less conducive to reaching conclusions. Echoing them is easier. All

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we have to do is to sit for a period, soaking our cortexes in the laundromat of the mind, and we will hear conclusions that we can echo. Among these will be a number of newly created "shoulds" to make us feel easier about our failures in life. We will now buy a certain automobile because, otherwise, how can we "know pride's deepest thrill"? Other products will be associated in our minds with success, peace, love, devotion, harmony—all those things, in fact, which we have been unable to come by otherwise.

How well we will be able to hold up as human beings under the pressures of mass-induced Shoulditis remains unclear. But one thing we know from human history: the answer to Hidden Persuaders has always been the development of Hidden Resistors. Socrates was mindful of this when he said, "Life unexamined is not worth living." Lord Byron, who received not only a Cambridge education but considerable education as well in boxing from Gentleman Jackson, then heavyweight champion of England, also expressed the matter well when he said, "A man must calculate upon his powers of resistance before he goes into the arena."

Several methods of resistance to Shoulditis, which for their elucidation must await later chapters, have always been at our disposal. One of these is the recovery of the "want." It is a turning point in man's life when he learns to ask, "What *do* I desire?" It is not compulsory to surrender the claims of our uniqueness nor to feel compelled to choose what others feel we should choose. As Bernard Shaw wisely put it, "Do not do unto others as you would have them do unto you: their tastes may not be the same." Another means of resistance is in the recovery of our human ability to draw conclusions for ourselves. Many years ago psychologist Carl Jung was approached in a Zurich classroom by a student who wanted to hear something to echo. "What should I do about love?" the

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student asked, and Jung replied: "I cannot tell you what you should do. That must be left to the person who always knows what is best for other people."

Seldom in history have leaders doubted that they knew what was best for other people. A third way of building resistance against Shoulditis today is to learn something about how poor human nature has been pulled and pushed during the major Shoulditis epidemics of the past. All the strivings we have discussed thus far—to be perfect tomorrow by excellent attainments in happiness, in love, in financial success, in the successful burial of our insufficiency by symbols of perfection—are, broadly speaking, outcroppings of older imperatives of the "should" which have had a profound effect in the molding of our lives.

In the next chapter we will look briefly at some of these provocative epidemics in terms of our troubles with perfectionism today.

4.

Curiosity Used to Kill the Cat

THERE IS ONE LIVING CREATURE AROUND US THAT cannot be buffeted, cajoled, motivated, or otherwise adjusted to modern urgencies of the "should"—and that is our household cat. Surveyor of all she possesses, serene rebel against all our laws, fluffy denier of our points of view, and in the dark incubus that is her heart a true descendant of the Black Mass, this laughing animal forever draws her delight from her chosen contradictoriness. She seems to caress us, but she caresses herself upon us. She has an infallible memory of our wishes, but so that she can deny them—as long ago she denied the ancient Egyptians, who tried to influence her soul by embalming her, and later denied the people of medieval Europe, who sought to destroy her curiosity by killing her.

If she scorns our tenderness and is not touched by our offerings, this is because her ancient memory accepts these only as proper expiation on our part; for she remembers that for centuries in the medieval world our ancestors battered, tormented and even hanged her in somber ceremony for her

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possession of the one trait that is her greatest distinction—her curiosity. Our maxim, “Curiosity killed the cat,” comes down to us from no accidental phrasing. For in the medieval world the word for “cat” was the word “ketzer,” which meant heretic, and the heretic was often killed for his curiosity.

She knows, too, that an interesting proportion of us, had we lived in the time of the Middle Ages, would have found enjoyment in watching the burning of cats, and heretics. Only if you have watched a bullfight and experienced mounting pleasure at the approaching moment of the kill can you understand what is meant here: the heretic was to the people of his age no more than a bull. He had forfeited, by the manner in which he exercised his curiosity, all right to belong to the company of mankind. From the moment of his apostasy he was erased from the affections of the living. It became a duty to destroy him as one whose nature was that of a snake, an adder—or a cat.

“Wherefore, ye folk,” cried the preacher Berthold, speaking of the cat, “drive her away, for the breath that cometh from her throat is most unsound and perilous— And thence also hath the heretic the name of Ketzer, since he is like no beast so much as a cat.” For the crime of keeping black cats, the Stadinghi sect of the thirteenth century came under accusation in a Bull of Pope Gregory IX, and generally throughout early Europe, the cat was the Devil’s ally, poisoner of the water, causer of death by her sneeze, and emulous rival of the witch whose looks can kill.

Not without reason was the cat feared. To our symbol-loving ancestors she exhibited, in her small independent way, that invincible curiosity which has forever been the implacable foe of man’s authority. Her investigations, her fearless comings and goings, were miniature tokens of the kind of

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curiosity which, when it exists in man, renders him the most dangerous questioner of all authority.

Not all curiosity came under censure, however. Our ancestors always admired "healthy curiosity"—that is to say, curiosity to learn more about the things believed in and regarded as appropriate for inquiry. We believed, for instance, in the use of reason, which might be described as the activity of finding "reasons" for going on believing what we already believed. Not even in the darkest times of history was this "healthy" curiosity ever opposed. The full force of censure was directed exclusively against its "unhealthy" opposite—against what we might call "natural" curiosity—the curiosity of the unsuborned who cannot be purchased by love, authority, superstition or terror—the curiosity of the cat.

Once this difference between "healthy" and "natural" curiosity is noted, we can begin to see why there has been such a long campaign in human history to kill the "ketzer" and, in general, to make natural curiosity unattractive. It has always been unsettling to human vanity, for instance, when the satirist in his indirect manner pries into motives behind those actions we have previously set forth as perfect. There are understandable reasons as well why we may wish to kill natural curiosity quickly in time of trouble. Censorship closes down on the state under siege. Even in ancient Athens, there came an hour when curiosity had to be destroyed. Few objected to Socrates' methods of exposing human ignorance, though many were bruised. But their bruises were never forgotten. When the Athenians, defeated, war-weary, and fearful, ceased to examine their ignorance, they examined Socrates instead. They remembered him as a person of curiosity who had exposed them to ridicule and consequent loss of prestige; they remembered him as one who "pried into the heavens and the secret places under the earth"; they recalled that he

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pried into all homes, not merely those appropriate, that he had made friends with all kinds of people, as a cat does, and that he was a fellow-traveler of Alcibiades who betrayed Athens to the enemy. With all the force of unchecked emotionalism they put Socrates to death as a threat to democracy and as one "who asked too many questions." By no means was "healthy" curiosity responsible for Socrates' trouble: he was punished for the natural curiosity of the cat, for it was this that took him into areas where perfectionists fear to tread.

Looking backward in our own Western culture, we can readily discover three major perfectionist ideals in the service of which natural curiosity had to be opposed.

First of these to assault our natural curiosity was the ideal of submission to perfect authority that grew up after the collapse of the Roman Empire. It is not easy, today, to picture the sorrow and embitterment that such a long time ago accompanied the fall of Rome, nor to understand, for instance, five generations afterward, the despairing cry of St. Gregory the Great: "What is there now, I ask, to please us in this world? Everywhere we see mourning and hear groans. Cities are destroyed, the fields are destroyed, the land is become desert . . . Rome stands empty upon the fire. . . . Moreover, this grinding of Rome to pieces we know to be repeated in all the cities of the world. . . . Let us, therefore, despise with all our heart this world present or destroyed. Let us end our wordly longings with the end of the world."

Such statements of despair were to harden through the generations into a rejection of the world, a rejection known as *contemptu mundi*, as well as a complete repudiation of man as a creature capable of reasoning out his existence. In medieval cathedral art, for example, if you will look under the feet of a carved statue, you will often find a little trodden-

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on creature. This is the new Western man, held underfoot by authority: this is the symbol for his guidance. Among these statues are startling little dramas: Moses tramples on the golden calf, Christ treads on basilisk and adder, the apostles stamp on such kings as have hampered their movements; on the north porch of Chartres Cathedral the Queen of Sheba daintily raises her skirts as she steps on a crouching Negro; under the feet of St. Gregory is the head of his secretary. On the porch of the Cathedral at Amiens stands the figure of St. Fermin. His face is bathed in celestial light, but his mouth turns down at the corners in sternness. One of his feet is crushing the face of a tiny man who lies prostrate, his legs bent under him; the other great foot presses down on his knees.

Such was the counsel in stone. Whatever man had imagined about his powers of reasoning was only a snare and a deception. His depravity, in a world about to die, was such that he must abandon his fruitless prying into meanings. As Tertullian had clearly said, "Investigation is unnecessary since the gospel." Man's earthly, natural curiosity was sinful, presumptuous and wholly justified his being kept underfoot. He was told the shabby earth exists not for his delight and wonder but solely as a footstool to heaven. Surely St. Jerome had said: "Does your skin roughen without baths? He who is washed in the blood of the Lamb need not wash again." All man sees and touches exists solely as a symbol for his instruction. Only as he submits himself utterly to thinking correctly about these symbols, as explained to him by theological authority, can he hope for salvation.

It is neither possible nor to our purpose in these brief pages to analyze the innumerable steps by which theological authority came to set forth the conception of depraved man silhouetted against a perfect universe with seven heavens

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and four rivers of paradise. What does concern us here is the effect of these depictions on people in their secular everyday life. What we would today call "credulosity" was for medieval people simply the "healthy" acceptance of a given set of pictures and values under conditions that made skepticism unsafe. Since the human mind can be thus rendered malleable as that of the cat cannot, these people soon accepted a number of convictions that to us would seem extraordinary. They could learn through the authority of Bartholomaeus that horses weep "when their lords be dead," that elephants never lie down, but "when they be weary they lean to a tree and so rest somewhat," that in the wilderness there are people called Bennii who have no heads, but "they have their eyes fixed in their breast," and that in Finland exist male witches who appear whenever sailing ships are becalmed, and "they proffer wind to sailing, and so they sell wind." Concerning human beings in general they could learn that the lungs are the bellows of the heart, that the brain is the home of feeling, and that the liver is the seat of love. If you could care for anyone under all these conditions, you would have to say: "I love you with all my liver."

With natural curiosity thus almost expunged from Western Europe there was no reason to wonder why war was the day's work of the millions and most people seemed cheerful about it. This was because they had heard from authorities such as Honoré Bonet in his *Tree of Battles* that war was good and given by God. Strange as the old language of this fourteenth-century book may look to you in the following extract, read it aloud for the sounds and you will have the meaning:

"... all gudis and all vertues commys of God, and of his awin commandement bataill was ordanyt. And [He]

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gave commandement till a man that was called Jhesususanne, sayand that he suld geve bataill till his inymyes."

After explaining that war is approved by divine law as a way of trying and purifying man, Bonet added that war comes from nature and is natural:

"... certaynly bataill cummys of nature, and be the lawis of nature; for quhy, naturaly all thing is enclynnyt to gaynstand thair contraire . . . and thus is it wele esy to knowe that bataille is a thing lefull and resonable to be done."

As often as these Master perfectionists counseled people to accept war as good they told them to repudiate woman as evil. With help from their authority it was "wele esy to knowe" that woman is so thoroughly evil that she can be pictured properly as a scorpion or a lizard. Langland, writing in the fourteenth century, has the Lord rebuke Lucifer: "Thou like a lizard with a lady's face." And Bishop Richard Poore, in the thirteenth century, writes: "The scorpion is a kind of worm that hath a face . . . somewhat like that of a woman." It is also "a serpent behind; putteth on a pleasant countenance, and fawns upon you with her head, but stingeth with her tail." This idea goes clear back to Solomon's remark: "He that hath hold of a woman is as though he held a scorpion." In general, however, most of such descriptions harkened back to Tertullian's declamation against woman: "You are the devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree," or to Ecclesiastes: "The badness of men is better than the goodness of women." Perhaps the most picturesque of all writings from these Masters of understanding is that of St. John Chrysostom:

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“What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colors!”

In every area of living stood an authority, sometimes a thousand years old, who described what “should” be seen. An old print shows the famous fourteenth-century physician Mundinus of Bologna taking the risk, contrary to laws which for hundreds of years had held against it, of performing a human dissection. Suddenly we notice something strange about this picture: the physician is not near the body; only the town barber is doing the actual dissection. Mundinus, ten feet above on a platform, is reading from a book written more than a thousand years before by the authority Galen. He is reading to learn where things are supposed to be. During one horrible moment we imagine the barber has found the heart not in place; quickly, however, this is moved a trifle, to the place where Galen in the second century said it “should” be.

If Shoulditis was the creed of the physicians in ordinary times, you can imagine what happened when the Black Death or bubonic plague of 1347 swept over Europe. With its thousands of casualties daily and more thousands unburied in the streets, what a feverish scrambling there must have been among old texts and parchment abracadabra to find methods of cure that “should” be observed. As so often happens in human history the Master perfectionists had provided ample “shoulds,” and the Understudies nearly destroyed civilization trying to follow them. The ancient medical learning of the Greeks, which might have helped them, had long ago been replaced by the authority of confident describers of life who denied others the right to look for

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themselves. It was inevitable, when none of the proposed remedies worked, that these people would fall to blaming the stars and that the University of Paris would announce, as it did, that the plague had been caused by the conjunction of three planets in the sign of Aquarius.

But you couldn't get your hands on the stars! Accordingly, as happened before with people in trouble, they remembered the curiosity of the cat. Who were the curious persons? At first they were the Jews—physicians, financiers, keepers of goods, outside the Christian faith, suspect of prying into unappropriate thoughts. Hundreds of these persons were put to death on the score that they had caused the plague by poisoning the wells.

There next developed among Masters the notion of seeking out all curious women of the neighborhood, who by their nature, which was one of inherent evil, might truly be witches. A handbook for finding witches appeared in 1484 and was circulated all over Europe. This book, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, by Professors Sprenger and Kramer of the University of Cologne, set the stage for one of the most passionate campaigns of extermination the world has ever known. Women accused as witches were dragged from their beds without warning to be burned for the good of the community. Forbidden to know their accusers or the charges, they were carried around the courthouse in wicker baskets, from fear of what would happen if their feet touched the ground.

Moreover no one could build upon ground where a witch had lived; children of witches, to the second generation, were denied work in the towns unless they bought their freedom. This they could do by exposing another witch. With each conviction, they came into at least partial possession of the witch's property. Self-appointed "witch-finding generals"

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were in time to appear, such as Matthew Hopkins in England, who would go from town to town ringing a bell and crying, "Bring me your witches!" Soon the town square would be crowded with onlookers who fell into hushed silence when the accused women were brought forward for testing. One by one, these unfortunates would be softly touched with the little pricking instrument Hopkins had brought along. Whenever he found a spot that would not bleed, a great shout of revulsion would go up from the crowd: "Incubus! Incubus!" He had found the spot of the Devil's contact; he had found a witch. Not for quite a while was it learned that Hopkins had ingeniously devised a retracting point to his little testing device for use on days when business was poor. So enthralled were the people with the perfect correctness of burning the witch that nobody had bothered to look.

How suggestible these people were! And yet how understandable, when we begin to surmise the tenor of their anxiety. The old faith in the perfect order of the universe was collapsing. For a while, ignorance had been bliss—to the answer-provider. Even the most desperate loading of the shrines of Europe with wealth and prayers had not, however, prevented the insidious recurrence of the plague at intervals of twenty years. In consequence, a slow disintegration of faith had left many people in a mood of unsureness and anxiety. For all the millions of people who found sanctuary in the emerging religious conceptions of the Reformation, there remained other millions who could only hope that a new "perfect order" could somehow be found.

Since from these disasters that had befallen man it seemed no longer possible to believe in a perfect order in the universe, an opposite ideal was needed to fire the imagination. And this second perfectionist ideal was not long in coming. We must become perfectly pure *inside!* Soon after the death

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of Queen Elizabeth, wildly emotional conversions began to take place outside the church. The Puritans were strange in appearance and stranger in manner. Never had throngs of people looked so plain and unadorned. With voices dry and astringent and a view of life expunged of all humor, with names like "Christ-Died-to-Save-the-World Barebones" these growing hordes of the "plain" began showing other traits that were to render the Puritans among the most remarkable Master perfectionists of all time.

With blinders on their motives, these arid rascals—the thousands who called themselves the "chosen few"—sought to behave as though they were perfectly free of every human debasement. They adopted a celibate life and promptly mingled more closely with persons of the opposite sex than before on plea of their fervent conviction that they were now free from stain of desire. This indeed was a change. For seldom in the earlier medieval world had people doubted the power of woman to bind man's will by her "favors." She could exert influence by conferring them or, like the women in *Lysistrata*, by denying them. Earlier theologians had been under the necessity of meeting this threat of the power of woman by preaching the unworthiness of the favors themselves. At times almost indulgent toward many other human vices, the church patristics at once abandoned the mediating tone and in their writings bristled with incomparable passages of condemnation whenever they dwelt on the sexual vices. The church was under the necessity of meeting with a special show of power this primal power of the favors of women.

Yet nothing the early church could do by way of denouncing sex proved nearly so effective, it would seem, as was the new, far more ingenious scheme of the Puritans. Simply render curiosity about women non-existent and the power of

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woman's favors will disappear. That which the early church clothed with revulsion, the Puritans rendered invisible by denying altogether. "It is not true that men and women feel desire," said the Puritan leaders, and they sealed their unnatural bargain with life by making the women say so themselves!

After having nullified the existence of women as capable of arousing their curiosity, and otherwise having learned to behave as though they were perfectly free of human desire, the Puritans then created for themselves a singular singing commercial as to their unworthiness for salvation. Their barren little books, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*, *The Practice of Piety*, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and many such, soon caused them to tremble and agonize for fear that they would never be accepted into Heaven. Gloomily they scanned the terrors of Hell, decided with Calvin that the majority were predestined to burn eternally, and called themselves "children of the wrath of God."

Since these apostles of the Perfectly Pure saw conduct as the index of the soul, they strove on the outside to obliterate every sign of joy and gaiety. They pulled down the public bells, defaced many of the finest sculptured cathedral doors man's artistry has ever conceived. In England they pulled down the Maypoles, expressed their fury at the first act of *Hamlet* by securing a majority in the House of Commons for the passage of a bill forbidding profane use of God's name on the stage. Under Cromwell, a little later, they succeeded in closing the theaters, abolishing dancing and festivals, and otherwise rendering drab and jejune the atmosphere of the towns.

These ancestors of the people who put plaster pants on Boston statues were never satisfied, however, that they had sufficiently expiated for the sin of having laughed and played

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as children. Accordingly, they strove to make sure that such children as by osmosis were born to them would never indulge in that laughter.

When in public they mourned their perfect unworthiness, they may not have been wrong. For their goal of perfect purity had almost succeeded: they were purged of all linkage with human enjoyment, purged of natural curiosity concerning the arts of life and the cultural tradition, and their greatest skill—and some of it has come down to us—was in killing natural curiosity by behaving as though it never existed. In consequence of all these purgations, probably a more pure and barren people could not be found anywhere until this Day of Our Television.

From these Puritan attitudes we may have inherited many problems. By no means are they confined merely to questions of sex, although they are involved, to be sure: in the theory that a good woman is passive in physical love (for example, Lord Acton's celebrated conviction that women don't have sexual feelings) and that an acknowledged hunger for sexual experience on the part of either sex is somehow low and unworthy. From Puritanism, for instance, we may have inherited our usage of decolleté, which in American use might be described as woman's device for making a man look so that she can be indignant when he does. Our central involvement with the Puritan attitude, however, extends into far wider realms of conduct than we may have supposed.

What Puritanism affects more seriously, today, is our natural curiosity. We are, for example, going through a phase of "healthy" curiosity about religion which takes the form of a certain urgency to share religious experience with others; yet we seem not to be curious about that great source of religious inspiration known as solitude. Meditation, as understood in the East, seems silly to people under a compul-

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sion to be groupishly busy. Every Sunday, for instance, in the sheltered cove where my little ship is moored, a certain number of solitary men in rowboats come out to drop a kedge anchor and fish. Each one is prepared to sit alone peacefully for hours in this manner with his fishing pole. But deprive him of this pole, however, and suggest that he merely sit in the boat, where he can be seen by others, and at once he feels foolish. The compulsion to look busy is one of our Puritan inheritances: for Puritanism was most hotly opposed to the exercising of the natural curiosity that might incline a man to wish solitary meditation and other such experiences apart from the group-approved order. Other examples of Puritan dictates would be: preference for traveling in tours rather than separately, avoidance of exposure to cultural activities not regarded as belonging in the realm of healthy curiosity (for example, aversion of men to poetry), and, above all, the sense of unhappiness that comes when curiosity carries one away from areas of group activity. Taken all in all, the Puritan inheritance exhibits itself wherever natural curiosity is rendered unattractive.

The third major perfectionist assault on natural curiosity in Western Europe was the ideal of "perfect feeling." You will have gathered, from earlier remarks concerning Romanticism in the eighteenth century, that the wave of eagerness to discover perfect places and locate perfect people often led to such artificiality that people ended by doing what they never really wished to do. Significant to us here, however, is the fact that their pursuit of perfect feeling and their histrionic posturing when they claimed to have found it quickly and effectually destroyed curiosity about natural feeling. It led to a fashion of exhibiting sensations before they were actually felt.

Seldom has there been an age when men took so much for

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granted about women, and knew so little. So rapidly did they elevate women to pedestals of perfection, so thoroughly did women thus elevated strive to maintain the silence and stupidity which were considered perfectly adorable, so rapidly did men grovel on their pink knees in enjoyed tears before these objects of their devotion, that neither could ever be quite sure of having been introduced. Neither male nor female appears to have been curious about the actual psychic life of the other. You have but to read carefully, for an example, Keats' "Ode on Melancholy." Here it must first be noted that "melancholy" was an especially delicious way of suffering without knowing what the problem was. You could sulk, as I suggested earlier, in the wildwood. But also you could suffer before the image of the nameless woman, as Keats does in this poem:

*Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.*

Not at all, as you can see, is this poet curious about the actual woman behind the peerless eyes. She could be anyone, or she could go away and leave merely her soft hands and her peerless eyes for him to feast on and so caress himself with melancholy: the last thing in the world he has in mind is that of listening to her reasons for being angry. Many of the romantic poets behaved in this way, like lovable perfectionist dogs who go around hiding bones they have never sniffed and will therefore never remember.

Why did these people surrender so easily their natural curiosity? Once more the inducement to seek something "finer and nobler" had prevailed. To see how strong was this quest for perfect feeling we need only to look briefly into the tear-dampened books of this age. In one of them, inci-

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dentially, McKenzie's *Man of Feeling*, the word "tears" appears on every page but two. Many such writers, serving as national manufacturers of tears, so succeeded in blinding people's brimming orbs that it was only with difficulty that they could find their way. One heroine of a popular play, reporting an attempted assault on her actual self, is made to say, "When I felt his hand in my bosom, I fainted." Now pause for a moment, and consider. Somehow, do you not suppose, she might have been able to see this melancholy hand arriving? Not she. For women, the only way to succeed in company was to be vaguely elsewhere; the only perfect response to assault was to faint. Other examples exist by the score, but the general characteristics of perfect feeling may be grasped from the foregoing. The pursuit of perfect feeling served to kill curiosity about actual feeling.

The romantic poets died in wretched bitterness, most of them, and yet in appearance they seem to have prepared their thoughts of death as sternly as the Greeks had done. But, in dying, how differently they behaved! When we look to the hour of death in ancient Athens, we often find resignation; and those dying seem to depart in a stern mood of reconciliation to necessity. Not so the romantics. They never really believed the somber view they used for their games of melancholy, and when life neared its close they screamed and *put* with their feet in outrage and piteous disbelief. Whether in time of love or death these perfectionists of feeling paid dearly for banishing their curiosity about the actual feeling of life.

As I have tried to suggest in these vignettes of perfectionist attitudes in the past it is by no means certain that we behave as we do simply because we have chosen to be the way we are. Often that rich source of effectual living and relating—our natural curiosity—has never really come forth from

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under the burden of inherited Shoulditis from the past. If for no other reason than to consider the possibility that this has happened, we need to reopen the book of human history. We can't leave the past alone because the past won't leave us alone.

We have proved that we can change plants and flowers considerably, and history seems to suggest that we have changed many aspects of man's nature—not drastically, to be sure, and not always for the better. Before we accede to the generality, "You can't change human nature," we may need to determine what parts of human nature are needlessly bound by our perfectionism—that could be changed for the better if we knew how we had been bound. I believe that we carry with us many images wholly poisonous to our human nature. Blindness induced by their influence will not permit us to see them. At this stage of my understanding I divide these images into two categories: images, such as those described in this chapter, that were created in the past and still exist to warp our perception in the present; and "emerging" images, or those evolving out of the present whose full damage will be realized in generations of the future. Unwittingly, we are often bound by the perfectionism of the past: Could it be that with our own perfectionism today we are binding the future? This question will be of concern to us in the next chapter.

5.

What's Wrong with Right-thinking People?

ACENTRAL WARNING IMPLICIT IN HUMAN HISTORY is that whenever civilizations have so far heaped up the measure of perfectionism that they have become obliged for protection of their institutions to withdraw from the exercise of natural curiosity, they have not only brought suffering on themselves: they have also projected suffering into the future. To set this statement in perspective, let us ask one provocative question: What delayed the birth of modern medicine so long?

Apparently we were not necessarily "intended" to wait for the discovery of miracle drugs until this mid-century. There was a delay. It was only a fifteen-century-long intermission. But the fact that man sat it out, rejecting the role of examiner of his own ignorance, is one of enormous consequence to us. Had the Greek spirit of natural curiosity been allowed to continue down the centuries, and the cards of knowledge, uncovered, allowed to fall without fear as to what they might reveal, our life today might be wholly different.

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As early as the fifth century B.C., the physician Hippocrates, whom we honor as the father of medicine, was setting the stage for a peculiar inquiry into the nature of man. To all necromancers, magicians, astrologers, and other possessors of perfect supernatural answers to life's events, Hippocrates had but one point to make: "Nothing ever happens without a natural cause, and without a natural cause nothing happens." His abiding concern in medical inquiry—and he urged it upon Athenians in other walks of life as well—was to drop the perfectionist manner of describing things and instead start looking afresh to see "what happens." What if we had continued through the centuries in this ancient spirit of inquiry? What might have happened had we been dominated only by the wish to study man's needs objectively and to meet those needs cleanly without resort to perfectionist self-enthralment? Clearly, many of our major physical diseases of today and most of our mental illnesses might well have ceased to trouble the earth by the end of the tenth century A.D.

While we will never learn what might have happened, we can learn what is happening today. We are still obstructing our own evolution. Older forms of perfectionism have yielded their hold upon us. No longer is natural curiosity the main source of heresy on the road to salvation, nor does the Puritan kill natural curiosity quite so publicly by becoming numb all over and denying its existence. Even the perfect feelers of yesterday are outmoded. What we have today, multiplying over the land, is a new horde of obstructionists. Whether Master or Understudy perfectionists, they perform their function under the name of Right-Thinking people.

What do we mean when we say of a person that he is "limited"? Surely it has become apparent in these pages thus far that all the persons we are likely to meet on this earth,

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including ourselves, are "limited" in vision, in comprehension, and in perspective. Assuming this universal limitation, can we then ascribe to certain persons of our acquaintance the quality of being especially limited? Perhaps the persons today who most obstruct our evolution are those who have perfectly limited themselves by their lifelong insistence on being right.

Right Thinkers are prideful persons sealed off from themselves and from experience because of their conviction that they have found the right way for themselves—and for you. They may be recognized quickly: first, because they want you to get on the "right track"; and, second, because as you will usually discover, they have brought their "right track" with them for you to get on. That you must get on their track is a matter of their pride because: "There are no two ways about it," "You're either with us or against us," "There's a right way and a wrong way," and "I have the right way."

In order for these Right Thinkers to hear themselves being right on all occasions they may need to resort more frequently than other people to what are called "artificial dichotomies." If you want to know what these are, simply draw a line and say, "Here are the good people and there are the bad; these are the kind people, and those are the cruel," and you are making what is called an artificial dichotomy. This habit of stacking people on either side of a line is very ancient but its usage today still results in colorful little dramas around the world. For instance, even though you may have become acquainted with Paris cafes, unless you have lived in Paris for a while you may not know about another phenomenon which to Parisians is almost as familiar—the down-and-outers called *clochards* who stand in front of street cafes to harangue the people who sit at the tables. With haggard glances, flailing arms, and winey imprecation they assert the

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awful injustice of a world which produces the dichotomy of the “haves” and “have nots.” The stage for their artificial dichotomy is easily arranged, for all they have to do is to draw an imaginary line down the pavement between themselves and the diners. Apart from this line nothing about the dichotomy is clearly drawn, for often the haranguer looks healthy and has all his teeth, while the diner hunches wanly over the few things he still dares to eat and wonders if his next set of grinders will have less clatter. An absorbing question arises as to which person is dining the more enjoyably—the poor devil at his table or the luxuriating haranguer, feast-
ing on the richest food of his Right-Thinking: the artificial dichotomy.

Unconcern over the possibility of being mistaken also enables the Right Thinker, as a true perfectionist, to describe things so easily without looking at them that he can squeeze a great many things into a nutshell.

Have you ever noticed the gestures people make when they decide to put things in a nutshell? With chopping hands and pointing fingers, given to expansive movements with heads and arms, they say, “The whole truth is simply this,” and then round it off with: “I’ll put the whole thing in a nutshell.” Out come the special gestures of nutshelling to show that these Right Thinkers have seen everything clearly. They also want to convey that they have included everything in their nutshell and have produced something of permanence.

But have you ever been put in a nutshell? If so, you probably began to see why “simple truths” and Right Thinkers provoke a goodly share of the conflicts in this world. The use of “all” and “whole” words leads to far more trouble than ordinarily is produced by the exigencies of life. When a Right-Thinking person comes gesturing before us to squeeze

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us into a nutshell with his simple truths, it is not long before our own gestures are seen to rise in angry accompaniment of our own "all" and "whole" words that we have decided make up the nutshell in which *he* properly belongs.

If there is any "simple truth in a nutshell," it is that we have for a long time needed to get rid of simple truths and nutshells. A basic axiom for learning anything is that we must first discard the Right Thinker's king-sized expressions of the absolute, the all and the final, since they suggest a perfect perception we do not have, before we can find our way to the improved perception of which we are capable.

Not all Right Thinkers, however, do their nutshelling in public. Some make their own little nutshells in private and make them so well that their nutshells contain all the people they know, and there is nothing left for them to observe. The effect of their nutshelling is that these Right Thinkers soon become frightening to other persons. So completely have they obliterated their natural curiosity that they seem, when in the presence of other people, to have no faces. And this can be as unnerving to the onlooker as it was to Captain Ahab when he was about to confront the great white whale in Melville's novel. What terrified him about Moby Dick was not the whale's enormous bulk but rather the incredible fact that, as he cried: "He has no face! I say, he has no face!"

Naturally we are reduced to fear when someone has no face. Ordinarily most faces are, as Shakespeare has one of his characters say, "like a book" full of strange matters and changing reactions as their owners are influenced by blows, caresses, threats, the bludgeoning of fate, and the arrival of money. All our lives we are accustomed to read these records of reactions in the faces of others in order to learn as best we can from the eyes, mouth, and even the chin what treatment we can expect to receive from their owners. When in-

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stead of a face, however, the Right Thinker exhibits only a kind of unregistering mask that seems to have been made up long in advance and remains unchanged regardless of what we say or do, we are suddenly apprehensive.

And no wonder! What this mask-like quality reveals, in all likelihood, is that something more than facial muscles has ceased to function behind the mask we see: its owner has become so thoroughly a Right Thinker that he has ceased to be a reacting animal and we have every reason to be afraid of him. To speak more feelingly on the matter, I have long believed that obituary notices might well be posted not only when a man is physically dead but especially when he becomes a Right Thinker and ceases to be a reacting animal. Otherwise expressed, when the Right-Thinking person has gone so far with his delusion of understanding everything in advance that he has ceased to react with natural curiosity to people and events around him, it is only hygienic that he be declared dead before people get into trouble with him by thinking otherwise.

If it is hazardous for anyone to live with a Right Thinker, it is even more dangerous to be one. The essential trait of these persons is a pride of correctness which may develop around its possessor not only a tough insulation against other people but also against the crucial realities of the outside world. It is precisely this tough integument of pride which, as we say, "goeth before a fall" and that in the Greek world was greatly feared under the name of *Hubris*. Whoever in those days could not thrust from him this horny, chitinous integument of pride before it sealed him off from the world had already gone beyond the point where he could save himself. No matter what he thought about his virtues he was subject to the fierce and summary Nemesis of the gods and

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justly plunged to his destruction. Our nursery rhyme about Humpty Dumpty is, in fact, almost the same thing simplified:

*"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
And all the king's horses
And all the king's men
Could never put Humpty together again."*

Despite all evidence in history that we are grievously punished for assuming the world holds only what we have seen, this has not prevented a great many modern people from being Right Thinkers. So pervasive are they in society that, instead of our inscribing on the pediments of our colleges, libraries, and halls of justice such maxims as "Know Thyself" and "To Thine Own Self Be True," neither of which we can understand, it would be far more appropriate to write there the sage warning: "Humpty Dumpty Sat on a Wall." For our world is full of Humpty Dumpties, wall-sitting perfectionists who seal themselves off by their Right-Thinking. And wherever they are, there are also to serve them on their occasions of falling a ready-made assortment of modernized king's horses and king's men with names like Mescalin, Miltown, Psychoanalysis, Occultism, and Self-Help Guidebooks.

Only rarely, however, can modern Humpties be put together again by their king's horses or king's men. For one thing, while some of these Humpties in their pride may grudgingly admit to a short fall, they may be unable to admit their shell is seriously cracked. Or they may arrange to have us understand that the pratfall we saw them take was not a fall at all but rather an ingenious ballet movement on the way to greater success in another and more important area of life. Both Jung and Adler have attested to the number of

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these persons who seek professional "help" more or less simply to outwit the psychiatrist and prove they have no reason to be cured. These Humpties who resist and dig with their feet against acknowledging they are in any sort of trouble used to draw from Dr. Adler in Vienna a smiling concession: "You are too strong for me!"

Other Right Thinkers in trouble refuse to acknowledge having fallen down because of their secret expectation that they are going to receive help anyway—and in a way that will not force them to admit anything. Some look for future recognition and vindication of their rightness all along. Others repose a peculiar, secular faith in Providence to provide a private eleventh-hour repair. And still others hope that tomorrow's light will disclose their problems gone and their enemies slain.

It is startling how old in history these Humpty maneuvers are and what a large number of curious, mirthless king's horses and king's men were usually standing around to help. That great medieval physician Henri de Mondeville was a remarkable king's man. He realized the value to patients troubled with *accidia*—the medieval form of neurosis—of giving them what were known as "herbs of solace" and suggesting that their problems would be gone tomorrow. He used to tell the other beak-doctors and stone-surgeons of his day: "Keep up your patient's spirits by music of viols and ten-stringed psaltery, or by forged letters describing the death of his enemies. Or if he be a Canon, inform him that his bishop has just died and he has been elected in his place."

This king's man was wise beyond his time. If in the end he could not put together the Humpty Dumpties of his day any better than we can ours, this was no matter because he had no intention of putting them together, and the Humpties had no intention of acknowledging that they had fallen apart.

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The major use of therapy was simply to reassure the patient.

Similarly, today, the popularity of those self-help guidebooks that descend like manna from the psychiatric heavens perhaps derives from the fact that they actually do help millions of Humpty Dumpties to feel better. From these books they can construe their own reasons for staying as they are and for going on doing what they were going to do anyway.

It would seem a real pity, as life goes on, that many thousands of Humpties discover they are still on a wall and that their wall is too lofty for other persons to reach them. In their loneliness they desperately want to come down—without waiting to fall down. Their view was fine for a while; now it has turned cheerless, bleak, and provocative of fear.

Do you know what it is that finally makes these Right-Thinking Humpties truly desire to come down? Certainly it is not exhortation from pulpit or lecture-hall podium. Nor is it even the proffering of four-way happiness tablets by those obsequious pranksters of the psyche who promulgate the written myth of overnight rebirth. What brings people down, finally, is a gradual discovery that Right Thinking is poisoning their lives, must continue to poison their lives, and that there is no hope of rescue from any source whatsoever.

One of the greatest self-help guidebooks of all time for those Humpty Dumpties who want to come down now stands in your living room in the form of a famous play everybody knows about and almost nobody has ever read—Shakespeare's *King Lear*. It was never popular. The Puritans, always breathing down Shakespeare's neck, found good reason to alter it because of the natural curiosity contained in its pages. In 1681, professional adaptor Nahum Tate, who believed the stage "should" show virtue as triumphant, sugar-coated the old tragedy to provide a happy ending.

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What seemed like the grim pessimism of the play was avoided for nearly 150 years by omitting the Fool, restoring the throne to King Lear at the end, and by giving his daughter Cordelia an eleventh-hour betrothal to Edgar. No one wanted the original Shakespeare. Even today, those who read it with a critical eye may be startled by the strange, final verdict of the heavens. As though anticipating by 350 years a cause of today's neuroses, Shakespeare seems to strike at the heart of Humpty's problem in our society.

What emerged, after the play was restored to the original Shakespeare, is, simply, a self-help guidebook against all self-help guidebooks as we know them; also it contains a very bad sting—and a warning—and an unusual reason for hope.

What the sting amounts to is that not only you but even a great man can lose touch with reality and not know it. The curtain goes up to reveal an old king who has given away his throne and cannot understand that he is no longer in charge. Misjudging everything around him, he keeps his enemies and banishes his kindest daughter and his most helpful friend. He does not know that he is losing touch. As his unfaithful daughter Regan says of him, "he hath ever but slenderly known himself." And the Fool tells him, "Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise."

What can the great man do when he is losing touch with reality? Listen to others? "Examine" himself? "Get" an education? Or "Get" psychiatry? Probably not, says Shakespeare in this play, for when the great man suspects he is losing touch his pride may seal him off from himself. And then the sealed man will have no self to help. Just as from the beginning Lear was blind to the designs of his daughters Goneril and Regan, so now his pride has made him blind to his blindness. It is strange, now, to see Lear on the throne. He remains lovable to those who know him and still can

love. Among these, Kent in disguise comes to serve him. Asked why he wants to serve, Kent, who has been startled to see his lord so poorly attended and without authority, falls to his knees and utters one of those wonderful lies of love: "You have that in your countenance which I would fain call master." Lear asks: "What is that?" And Kent replies: "Authority."

Another who loves him in his blindness is the Fool. His plight is that he cannot lie: "Prithee, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy fool to lie: I would fain learn to lie." The greatest lies, however, are deep within the King himself, and he is by now sealed off from all recognition of them: he has become the Sealed Man, the man of pride, the Humpty Dumpty high on the throne that has become his wall.

What can a Sealed Man do? Spurned and mocked, his retinue of soldiers insolent and soon withdrawn from service, King Lear rushes out in anger, crying to the heavens to send down violence, imploring that he be provided with "noble anger" so as not to bear these things tamely. But soon he is begging the gods for help. On his knees in the storm, white hair matted and streaming, eyes upward in anguish, he cries: "I am a man more sinn'd against than sinning." Around this piteous picture of Lear, and chorusing into the air from various points in the play, we hear other propitiatory words to the gods: "kind gods," "gods that we adore," "great gods," "sweet heavens," and "just" heavens—all of them culminating in the great cry of Lear himself: "O heavens, if you do love old men . . . if yourselves are old, make it your cause; send down, and take my part!"

Now Shakespeare lets crash upon our heads the ruthless judgment that made this perhaps the most terrifying play of all time. He crushes the optimist in us: the gods will not save this man because he has "but slenderly known himself."

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What brings terror is that the gods do not “love old men” who let age arrive without having “been wise.” As Kent has said, “Thou swearest thy gods in vain,” and now the play becomes a runaway train to catastrophe and the gods will not stop it to help Lear. When he is dying someone asks him to look once more to heaven for help: “Look up, my lord!” But Kent, who knows him best, gently responds: “Vex not his ghost. He hates him much that would upon the rack of this tough world stretch him out longer.”

The warning in *King Lear*, which makes it the toughest of self-help guidebooks and about as pleasant as the Paris catacombs, is that no matter how Humpty changes his eleventh-hour mind the expected eleventh-hour repair is usually not forthcoming. Our heartening maxim, “It’s never too late” is twisted awry in Shakespeare’s tough world to read: It *can be* too late, or, as we were told in the nursery rhyme, all the king’s horses and men “*could never* put Humpty together again.”

Do not imagine, however, that Shakespeare’s tough world is therefore a hopeless one. Behind the sting and the warning exists this reminder: that man has been provided a mind that may help him so long as he does not seal it off from exercise by sitting on the wall of expectations. When modern Right-Thinking Humpties come to realize that none of the advertised king’s horses and king’s men will save them, they tend to come down by themselves.

6.

The Positive Power of Negative Thinking

IF YOU SUSPECT THAT THERE ARE NO "SIMPLE truths" and are beginning to feel that the search for them has something to do with our continuing tendency to hamstring our own evolution, imperil our future, and dry up our sense of joy in one another, then it becomes important for us to examine what may be the most popular nutshell of modern American life—the idea that we "should" control our thoughts in order to make them positive.

When thinking about this chapter I decided that the words "positive" and "negative," at least as supplied to human thought, are unfortunate. They invite capricious imagery. For example, I find myself picturing each battery in my ship's fo'c'sle as blossoming with one great pole—the positive: I can see it gleaming with positive thought, glowing with assurance that having banished the negative pole it will now be released from tension and better able to light the lights on my ship.

Such imagery may not be wholly irrelevant. Even after I

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reassure myself that “positive thinking” simply means looking on the bright side of things and not dwelling on the dark, those batteries keep coming to mind. I know it to be true of them that without a certain relation between the positive and negative there would be no light aboard my ship. It may be as true of ourselves that a certain relation that runs between positive and negative, dark and light, good and bad, is needed for the creating of light by which to see our way.

A great deal of positive power comes from what is often called “negative” thinking. Every valid university course, for example, contains the galvanizing power of the negative. It opens with an acknowledgement on the student’s part that he does not know the subject, that much pain is demanded in learning it, and that he may fail in the attempt. As some professors have found, the harder the negative shock in the beginning, the greater the student’s energies are galvanized for the struggle to learn.

Not all university instructors take this view. On any American campus you can find two kinds of teacher: the Easy-Worlder, and the Tough-Worlder. On the Stanford University campus years ago I enrolled in the class of a learned and most entertaining English scholar who began his course by speaking about the value of relaxation: “These are trying months for you all, I know” he began. “And I would suggest you be philosophical about this course of mine. I warn you,” he went on, “that I am going to try so to enchant you with the material that you will *want* to learn everything you can about this subject. But take it easy: it is springtime outside. Cultivate the flowers of life, come to class sometimes and, if you should meet me on the quadrangles, you may say hello!”

Most of us were irresistibly drawn to him and to his advice. Within a week half the class was empty, and the remaining

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students were nodding to his words not so much in understanding as in slumber. As for his charm, most of us never heard much of it come through, for he was an Easy-Worlder and what we were doing was simply tailoring our behavior to his easy world.

Across the quadrangle were the large classes of Dr. B., most feared and admired woman professor on campus, who was known to exercise the power of negative thinking. Her opening lecture and her answers afterward to anxious students usually sent the young men away with faces as long as Solomon's at the dividing of the child, and some of the girls were dabbing non-academic countenances wet with unaccustomed tears.

"Most of you, let me be blunt, cannot think," she would begin. She was a stunning woman, with something of the keen-eyed theatrical air of an Ethel Barrymore, and to this startling effect was added an incisive and corrosive wit that could prove frightening, as well as a sharp tongue known to collapse the clasps of briefcases suddenly.

"Furthermore," she would go on, "you have probably not been trained, in this extended kindergarten, to make the simplest judgments that are your own. You will learn to make them here or you will not pass this course." She meant it. In the first place, she would eat no roseate apples of blandishment, either from clean-cut young men needing grades to continue as halfbacks, or from clean-living young women seeking to preserve unblemished records for Phi Beta Kappa. Nothing availed with her. She had invented, in the second place, a fiendish inquisitorial device at first innocently regarded as a weekly paper, and only later discovered in its true function as a guillotine. We found out about it. What she wanted in this weekly paper was some negative thinking. Or, more precisely, she wanted close, critical analyses

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of positive and negative factors to be found in a play, or novel; she wanted to know what effects were contrived and artificial, and what others were sound—and precisely why. In short, these papers quickly became a guillotine for lopping off the heads of Right-Trackers, Perfect-Feelers, Knowers-Before-They're-Told, and Positive-Thinkers. All these, in their turn—who had fared not too badly before, since it is one of the fantastic phenomena of American universities that students who learn to echo their instructor's sentiments can usually get by—were now head-lopped with their papers still in hand, and flunked out of the course.

Headless victims went by her desk, never to return, and she watched them go. Behind her inscrutable, leonine face I could almost imagine her saying the famous words of Fontanelle concerning a man on his way to be hanged for murder: "*Voilà un homme qui a mal calculé.*" (There goes a man who has calculated badly.) There was no denying it—she was a Tough-Worlder.

Through the centuries Tough-Worlders have made use of negative factors in life to promote positive results. After four years of experimenting with uranium, Madame Curie at last achieved a tiny gram of what would come to be known as radium. Dealing with it she had good cause for positive thoughts as to the future of her discovery. Afterward, however, some abrasions appeared on the skin of her hand; radioactive damage that had begun was not to stop there, but was to extend, as years went on, to her bone marrow and thence to her blood. She watched this deterioration also, as she worked. What was she to think? Suppose at this point a positive thinker had entered: "Cancel your negative thoughts!" "Empty your mind of what is bothering you!" "Minimize the unpleasant!" Would this have helped her? Had she elected to cancel her negative thoughts, she might

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have felt some of the temporary peace experienced by Mondeville's patients when they were lulled by the music of viols and ten-stringed psaltery. Madame Curie, however, preferred to consider some very unllulling negative thoughts. No slogan could alter the spread of cancer in her bone marrow. Rather than to minimize this negative factor because of its unpleasantness, she chose to bring it resolutely before her mind and to keep it there as she worked to safeguard the future from similar contamination. She made use of unpleasant negative factors to produce positive results—and we can be grateful that she did.

It would seem that one key to man's survival is that he has been able to utilize his negative thoughts. To the extent that he has been able to afford the full look at the worst and still go on cheerfully, he has advanced in ability to resolve problems of living and of relating to others. When the English novelist Thomas Hardy said, "Take the truth to your breast, and endure its horns," he was probably saying that sometimes the only "truths" of great value to us are those that hurt the most. Unfortunately, as our past history would seem to show, these truths with horns have usually had to wait until a more convenient time.

One of the most understandable responses to modern problems, "positive thinking," grew up as a protest against certain "negative" horns in life—the fears, anxieties and tensions, to say nothing of the sense of loneliness and emptiness produced by circumstances that surround our lives today. Not merely the collapse of old certainties but the emergence as well in our lives of new uncertainties have in our day led to a more or less frantic quest for something in which to believe that will restore a sense of safety as we go along. As we see mounting evidence of the insecurity of modern life this craving grows stronger. Almost daily we hear re-

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minders of the cancer-reaper; we hear of the threat to us of total annihilation by nuclear fission and by cloud-born radiation. We look up unto the hills from whence cometh large-yield explosions in the "megaton" range, and when we look down again we notice that the only "instrument-packages" we cannot put into orbit are ourselves.

Small wonder that few modern Americans are in the mood to be "tough-minded." This does not seem to be the time for strenuous individualism nor for the adoption within themselves of what Emerson called "the courage not to adopt another's courage." Rather, like those plague-ridden people of the fifteenth century who went around whistling in the dark and trying to forget what was happening to them, we want to have "another's courage" and we want to have it now. In a thousand books, pamphlets, radio sermons, and churches we seek to find it, in order that through borrowed courage we may be able to rehabilitate our own.

Among these dispensers of courage are the exponents of positive thinking, who are persuaded that there is an answer: If we will simply select and control what enters consciousness we will find release from fears, become happier, and be more useful. An animistic belief in the power of words, expressed in maxims such as "thoughts are things" and "as a man thinketh so is he," is introduced to solve our problem of anxiety. And, accordingly, instead of relaxing in the perfect wildwood of nature as our eighteenth-century ancestors did in order to take on by osmosis the quality of perfect peace that nature was then known to confer, we will now sit in the garden of perfect thoughts.

Unless we sit in this garden, we are urged, we will suffer the poisonous effects of negative thoughts about what stands outside the garden and will lose our morale. On the other hand, if we will plant in our garden of consciousness a num-

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ber of pleasant, healthy thoughts, these will produce a more peaceful condition of mental health. This, in turn, will favorably affect our unconscious attitudes and serve to improve our relationships with those around us.

Whether or not there is value in this planting of the garden, it is not quite correct to say that "thinking" is involved in the process. On the contrary, what is actually utilized in "positive thinking" is a faculty of quite another order. The positive "thinker" creates his sensations by a conscious and habitual manipulation of what is known to psychologists as the faculty of revery. Most of us, when we say we are thinking, are usually indulging in revery—that is, we are arranging and stringing together pleasant or unpleasant pictures in the mind. It is probable, if the truth were known, that Rodin's "The Thinker" was not thinking at all: he was just making a little gallery of pictures to go with his mood.

To handle this faculty of revery is easy but thinking, on the other hand, has always been one of the hardest tasks of man. According to Dr. Brand Blanshard of Yale University, in his book *The Nature of Thought*, there is nothing peaceful about the activity of thought. As Blanshard puts it, "Thinking begins with a shock to the system of thought already present." It begins, in other words, when there is conflict between what we have believed before and what we now observe may be true. "What liberates ideas is conflict," Blanshard continues. "When there is a conflict between an implicit idea and what is given in fact, the idea tends to force itself into explicitness and into recognition." Otherwise expressed, thinking is problem-solving. As best we can, we are required to gather all the pleasant and unpleasant evidence before us. Having done this, we can then be sufficiently shocked by what we see that is contradictory to give birth to thought. There can be no room for thinking, however, in

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the garden of our perfect pictures. What is positive thinking, in these terms, but an exercise in revery which requires, for its success, the dismissal of thinking? Thinking requires room for its own concomitants of anguish, humiliation, uncertainty, and all the other “negative” considerations that produce suffering.

When for the sake of our “sense of well being” we are asked to replace this old painful, abrasive work of thinking with the more pleasant activity of selecting the revery-pictures that will bring us peace, what emerges is a new variety of Puritanism—expulsion of thought for the sake of the purity and peace of a perfectly washed consciousness.

What the positive thinkers are trying to help modern people overcome, of course, is the debilitating effects that accrue from indulgence in negative revery. As they point out, morale does suffer, and deeply, when people “lose heart” and are unable to stop dwelling on unpleasant possibilities. Since this is true, and apparently our lifetime is devoted anyway to revery most of the time and not to thoughts, what can be wrong with lining our minds with pleasant and harmonious pictures for the sake of our health and the health of others?

Among those believing we do need to control what enters consciousness, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale is explicit in promising that happiness will reward the faithful exercise of a few simple rules. In his book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, Dr. Peale states clearly on page 125: “Never mention the worst. Never think about it. Drop it out of your consciousness.” There, as elsewhere in urging that modern people need to “eliminate from conversations all negative ideas,”¹ what Dr. Peale is trying to bring about, of course, is a change of mental attitude. So long as we “start each day

¹ Peale, Norman Vincent, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 27.

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by affirming peaceful, contented, and happy attitudes”² and “talk optimistically about everything,”³ we will invite success in our relationships. “You can make the mind give you back anything you want,”⁴ explains Dr. Peale, and adds: “deliberately drop happy thoughts into your conscious mind.”⁵ In addition, certain words such as “serenity” and “tranquility” are also to be dropped there in order for you to utilize a vast source of power.

Taken all in all, the formula for making the mind give us what we want is summed up in these words on page 70 concerning the problem of being happy: “I just choose to be happy, and that’s all there is to it.”

Most writers on positive thinking who have won followers in recent decades have not neglected to use valid psychological principles of persuasion. For example, if we analyzed the order of persuasive devices in a typical book-chapter, this is what we would usually find: (1) The writer lets you know that he is harmless: he will neither hurt you nor demand real work from you by forcing you to think. This means that no sentence, no phrase must be permitted to contain a thought that might disturb the placid mood of acceptance. (2) He flatters you by asserting that you already have great power and need only for its release to practice a few affirmative thoughts. This can win the reader quickly, for it is based on a sound psychological fact long ago noted by Descartes when he said: “Good sense is, among men, the most equally distributed—since each thinks he is abundantly provided with it, and few desire more.”

Having persuaded you that he is harmless and that you

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

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have power, (3) the writer must contrive to persuade you of his own power—by suggestion only, of course, but in a skilled manner that will produce an impact. Chief among the ways of achieving this impact upon the reader is to bring forth, at frequent intervals, examples of executive types who have come to the writer as a last resort and from whom they have gained help. Within the first hundred pages of Peale's book mentioned above, for instance, there is a procession of such images which, when seen all together, show that they cannot have appeared by accident. They are: "Most important business deal of my life," (page 1); "An executive consulted me," (page 3); "He associated with men who were rather well to do" (page 4); "He was on 'the inside' in the industry" (page 4); "one of the best businessmen . . . I ever knew" (page 7); "a man of considerable influence in that city" (page 20); "a man came to see me . . . an outstanding leader" (page 22); a "New York . . . business executive" (page 33); "a prominent physician" (page 37); "Every great personality I have ever known, and I have known many" (page 39); "a friend of mine, an industrialist" (page 41); "A famous statesman . . . I asked" (page 42); "He happened to be a prominent citizen" (page 45); "a prominent business leader, president of the board of trustees" (page 47); "many outstanding people" (page 51); "two famous industrialists" (page 53); "the chief of four executives" (page 62); "A television celebrity" (page 70); "an eminent authority" (page 72); "the leaders of that town" (page 82); "A prominent manufacturer" (page 94); and "A prominent citizen of New York" (page 98). By no means, however, is the usage of an "important-people department" restricted to Dr. Peale. Consciously or not, most writers who want to be believed exhibit a little procession of success stories, which have the effect of allaying

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the reader's suspicion and putting him in a better frame of mind to receive the next part of the persuasion: (4) The writer reassures you of the ease with which you also can be successful. This impression is best achieved by avoiding failure examples ("Never mention the worst") and by keeping the message uncomplicated by any mention of pitfalls along the way. Instead, the writer secures his effect best by reiterating the command to believe through a grillwork of examples of "important" people who succeeded by so doing.

Unfortunately for my own peace of mind, whenever I am shown a snapshot of the transformed oil executive, with his promotion in hand, exhibiting renewed warmth toward his family, something of natural curiosity within me spoils the mood. I am curious to see what happens to this prominent executive, not in the snapshot but in the next frame of what is probably a movie. I want to know how he will behave when things get tough—when he bruises the sore points of his psyche that were edited out of the persuasive snapshot. If I am not at ease with inspirational snapshots, it is because the life of any man is a moving picture comprising many lights and shadows, changes, reversals, and drab periods of just sitting around. The unwinding plot of this movie cannot be contained in anybody's still camera. It is harmful to urge by hundreds of implications that negative pictures and negative factors in life should be avoided. A major reason for the existence in our cities of such large staffs of psychologists is that we have been avoiding them too long. Easy-to-read pictures of life given to us in our schools, sung to us in our commercials, and written to us in our books are no preparation for life.

Our growth and ability to resist misery may depend upon our capacity to confront what psychologist Jung calls the "shadow side" of individual life. "Recognition of the shadow,"

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he has emphasized, "leads to that modesty we need in order to acknowledge imperfection." But positive thinkers, however, with their hoped-for perfect garden of positive thoughts, effectually reject their shadow; and one seemingly clear result of the rejection is that they are not unlikely to suffer the fate of King Lear and become sealed off from themselves. This is why Dr. Jung has emphasized: "It is a sin in nature to hide our insufficiency." And to all those who want to "change" their insufficiency, Jung adds, "We can't change anything unless we accept it." Nor can we, it would seem, do anything about the neurotic anxieties of our time until we confront and accept ourselves, our blindness, and our refusal to take "home truths" home.

When people object that such positive thinking as described above is all right for the millions, it is time for someone to say it is not all right. Survival of our American millions may, in fact, depend upon our ability to grow up. It has become hard to find a people in the so-called civilized world, today, who exhibit less realism than do Americans about the nature of life and what might be expected from it. One afternoon two years ago I was sitting across from psychologist Dr. Jolande Jacobi, co-worker and biographer of Dr. Carl Jung, at her home on Wilfriedstrasse in Zurich. When we began talking I had not realized that this discussion would bring home to me forcefully the conviction that we must give up playing perfectionist games in this shrinking world lest we become shrunken. Noticing Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders* among the manuscripts on her table, I had asked what she thought about our myth that possessions bring us happiness.

"That is not the problem," she replied. "In America, you believe that happiness is the goal of life. You are wrong already. Life is stultified by the search for happiness. The

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condition you seek never existed. The only way not to stultify and sicken life is to open the self to experience, and that means to run the risk of finding things out."

"But just who," I countered, "is going to take these risks? Jung tells us to 'look at the shadow side' of our own lives, but his seems like a very small voice when compared to all the voices in our daily lives telling us 'put your best foot forward.' Besides, we have a number of persuasive writers telling us not to put our worst foot forward, even in front of our own eyes."

To this she smilingly made answer: "What matter is it which foot? Again, in America, you are always teaching interpersonal relations, always wondering about your effect on others. That is why the self becomes empty—it is not experienced. The only relation that matters is with yourself."

Since most people have more problems, today, than money for a trip to the psychologists in Zurich, I wanted further to know what the educator can do to help—what Jung believes the laymen in education can accomplish.

"Jung," she said, "will first tell you that he does not believe in educational systems. Here, as well as in America, systems are always preaching the idea of good relations, of hiding the worst and loving everybody. All an educator can do is to invite you to risk, to look within, to see as best you can what is there, and to accept it. Only then, if you don't like what you see, can you begin to change it."

Afterward I came out and stood in the little garden for a while. Above me the Alps inclined their snow into the sky, and below me a few small bees were trying to drink from tiny blossoms on the ground. They, too, were eager for good life, but the wind from their eager wings was blowing the blossoms away.

From birth to death events occur to which it is needful

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that we react negatively. "The first time we smell the air," says Shakespeare's King Lear, "we wawl and cry." And it is well we do, for this is part of nature's design in order that we may release already existing tensions from the trauma of being born. Other experiences bring with them a dark side which must be confronted. The dark side may take the form of an overpowering, oppressive parent. Not to confront this shadow side of our growth, eventually, is to remain a child. As we go along, the dark side of other people may appear and must be confronted: their intolerance, greed, rapacity, violence and pride. Marcus Aurelius, who grew up and worked in one of the most corrupt societies of all time, showed his understanding as a Tough-Worlder when he remarked on the great importance of learning "to live without anger in the midst of lying and unjust men."

Still another dark side of life to be confronted is the fact that we are going to make enemies. That is, we are going to create deeply unfavorable impressions on a certain number of persons during our lives. Few of us are completely free, however, from the old perfectionist view that having enemies somehow denotes personal failure on our part. We have supposed that nice people don't have enemies. This illusion comes from sugar-coated history books and sachar-rine-filled history teachers, as well as from father, who wanted to have us think everybody admired him, to say nothing of mother, who hoped we would not find out the truth about father. As we grow older this illusion may go away but we seldom get around to learning that the "nicest" and the "greatest" people in the past were often the most heartily hated of their generation. Why hated? Because they took their stand. In human life we have gone nowhere until we have made enemies—made them not by picking quarrels

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but rather by refusing to be a mindless vegetable and a positive thinker for the sake of keeping the peace.

Chief of all our problems of confrontation, of course, concerns ourselves. Our power comes not from positive thinking but from plain looking. However low a position this seems to ask us to take, the fact would seem to be that if a doctored and fallacious view of life is required to keep us going, if we must live in a windy garden of affirmations, we shall remain sealed against the only honest joys we can ever know—the joys of expressing and giving that which is contained in the unique life that is our own. “Show those qualities that are in your power,” Marcus Aurelius said, and added: “If you are slow and dull, take pleasure in your slowness and dullness.” When a person can risk living with his shadow, looking at his own worst side when necessary, and still can take pleasure in the life he has, he becomes a worthwhile person to relate to.

If the garden of pleasant thoughts is delaying our evolution, this is because our challenge today is not to tint our view but to recover in full the shocking knowledge that we have no eyes. Socrates, who believed we must learn to see more, called himself the one-eyed man. In the medieval world many advisers, who believed we must learn to see less, also referred frequently to the eyes: “Looks can kill,” “The Devil can be received through the eyes,” “Leprosy can be contracted through the eyes,” and many more in this vein, with the general injunction to leave the problem of seeing to those who see perfectly. When, later on, Shakespeare was to become engrossed with the visual faculty, he approached the problem differently by having blind Gloucester cry out in a moment of his own truth: “I want no eyes: I stumbled when I saw.” But perhaps the most provocative reference to the eyes in terms of ourselves today

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occurs in the writings of Bernard Shaw and sounds like one of the most negative thoughts of our age: "If you have no eyes, and want to see, and keep on trying to see, you will get eyes." Negative? It would seem so, for "I have no eyes" is the prerequisite for wanting eyes; and the negative admission that we want eyes is required before we can get them.

Only knowledge that we have no eyes will help us to find our eyes while there is still a world to see. We need such eyes in order to love while there are still people to love.

7.

Can You Give Yourself Away?

ONE OF MY FRIENDS YEARS AGO LIVED IN A SHADOWY house full of books gathering dust—not because a good many of them weren't read, but because there were so many of them. Wherever you went, following the walls of cavern-like rooms and alcoved hallways on three levels of the house, you encountered these rows of books that towered to the ceiling and wore their dust with a macabre distinction.

Not everyone would have enjoyed as I did this consummation of dust and culture. Some would have thought it was foolish to give away the fact of keeping a dusty house. Others, whom we will call pathological dusters, would have gone through ecstasies of suffering to wander, as I did, following my friend to the books he always urged upon me. The height of their suffering would have come when we stopped before the shelves themselves. For then there was always a minor nuclear explosion as he drew forth a frayed volume, smacked it heartily, and began to read to me through the impartial haze. One might have thought, as my friend fingered the

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powdery margins with love and read with a Mephistophelian relish, that he almost regarded the dust as part of the experience.

Presently I realized, in extenuation, that my friend had other rituals of dusting than those we usually take on. For him, a professor who lived more than he professed, and for his wife, who filled available space with her paintings and sculpture, it seemed preferable to let the dust settle on the objects of their devotions than to let it settle on themselves. They knew that absorbing work is the miracle drug for anxiety and that, in terms of good living, there is no use having an immaculate house if you have a dusty mind.

If they were giving themselves away as keepers of a dusty house, it seemed not to matter to them. Somehow, as they continued through the decades, filling their house with projects, and with love, they were so busy keeping their lives free of dustballs that they never got around to those on the floor.

One of the most peculiar things about life is that if you don't give yourself away, somebody else will. No matter how right you are, no matter how systematically you have applied your philosophy to your daily behavior, you cannot force people to overlook your frailties nor to desist from one of the most ancient games of human life—that of giving you away to others. From the earliest comedy of man to the latest episode next door, we can see what relish people take in uncovering our human imperfections for their laughter. The telephone on our desk, notwithstanding its value in business, owes much of its rapid evolution to the fact of its usefulness as a catalyst in the spreading of laughter at other people's expense. And the prime target today, as in the ancient world, is the careful coverer of his own flaws, the person who will not let his insufficiency be known.

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One might suppose, from growing evidence in modern psychology as well as from the testimony of hundreds of voices out of our human past, that it is time to beat other people to the telephone and give ourselves away. Yet how this is to be done without disaster in a competitive world is not so evident. We can concede that certain advantages accrue to the man who is able to tell the best stories on himself; and we may admire Socrates for going ahead to the theatre when he learned the play for the night was a satire against him. And in this book thus far, we may have agreed that the perfectionists—Masters, Understudies, strivers, smotherers, Right Thinkers and Positive Thinkers—suffer by cutting themselves off from life. We observed how they live by the theory that the appearance of flawlessness is a practical and even a spiritual necessity for survival. And then we noticed how guilt concerning flaws (and anxiety lest discovery of them should impair their reception among their associates) causes them to waste valuable life-energies in elaborate schemes of concealment. How all this activity of hiding imperfections results in misunderstandings, loneliness, and withdrawal from life through unwillingness to take on the risks necessary to personal development may now be apparent. In short, the perfectionist refuses the awkwardness that is a necessary stage along the way to effective adult life.

It is one thing, however, for us to reconcile ourselves to our human imperfections, and yet quite another to know what to do with this knowledge in a competitive world. How can we show ourselves for the fools we are, for example, when everybody knows that it is suicide in business and social life not to “put our best foot forward”? Voices from the past urge us to “show our ignorance”; but history also abounds with precepts and warnings to the effect that

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“clothes make the man,” that “he who loses his appearance of success loses all.”

We do not have to go to history for our examples: they are all around us. Clothing continues to make the man. An acquaintance of mine used to keep his car in the garage; now that he has a new Cadillac he leaves it out in the driveway, which means that he has to wash it twice as often and lug all sorts of belongings twice the distance. But there is in his business a certain leverage obtained by a display of affluence, so long as no one finds out about his problem of paying for his car.

There are all sorts of psychological explanations available for the fact that when we fail to clothe our faces and go out looking defeated, we receive kicks; and to us the important matter is not the explanations but the fact that we do receive them.

Since nobody wishes to be condemned to avoidance by other people that soon may turn into outright rejection on the score of financial and social unworthiness, may it then be assumed that we are right back where we started? That concealment in life of our true condition and the faking of an appropriate attitude is necessary in order for us to get along in the world?

On this basic issue of human candor versus the fakery of the salesman there exists a gulf between the philosopher and the man on the street, and until this gulf is bridged neither one will be able to understand the other.

I am going to suggest that we can achieve far more observable practical results when we have learned the art of giving ourselves away. It is not true that we must pretend or fail: it is the pretending that hastens the death of salesmen and accrues to the misery of their families. Stronger, in fact, than the power of the salesman is the power of

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inner peace—the power evident in persons who do not have to win, who do not have to give others away, but rather who can afford to give themselves away. In this connection there is a story that when Sarah Bernhardt in her later years lived in an apartment high over Paris an old admirer climbed all the stairs and asked her breathlessly: "Why do you live so high up?" "Dear friend," she replied, "it is the only way I can still make the hearts of men beat faster." As many persons were drawn to Sarah Bernhardt so are we drawn to those who can extract amusement from their own plights and predicaments in life and whose enjoyment of us does not seem to depend on their succeeding in impressing us. What they seem to have is a secret source of strength that we cannot create or destroy. Their cheerfulness is not under our control. They seem to have nothing to lose by making allowances for their imperfections before us.

One evening Mark Twain, who loved to satirize the human race and once said it was a "pity Noah and his party didn't miss the boat," was burlesquing Longfellow, Emerson, and Holmes during a dinner speech in New England. Happening to look down more closely at his audience, he was startled to meet the eyes of—Longfellow, Emerson and Holmes. He paused a moment, and then observed: "I'm a great and sublime fool—but then I'm God's fool, and all his works must be contemplated with respect."

Giving ourselves away is not a confession of weakness before life: it is a way of arguing from strength, a strength that does not depend on today's winnings and losses. Nor does it mean going down in defeat before others. Most of the true defeatists in this world, wherever found, are persons who can't let go. They cannot afford to be low man on the totem pole of life. Some of the strongest and most lovable persons in this world, on the other hand, will be

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found to be those who could peacefully let us win—if this was our need.

There are, in the remainder of this chapter, eight ways of giving ourselves away for the sake of greater joy for ourselves and giving joy to others.

(1) CAN YOU SURRENDER THE AIR OF KNOWING BEFORE YOU'RE TOLD?

It will be easy for you to observe in other people the “knowing before told” habit—a goodly cluster of behavioral expressions come into play, including the glazed eye, a way of nodding faster as though to hurry you along past the point of the obvious, the “on the mark” look, waiting for you to finish. We are made nervous by this attitude in other people: have we been behaving this way ourselves? To behave differently, we must first surrender the attitude of “knowing before told” within ourselves. Are other people really dull? Or are we merely dull observers? What are we missing in others that might readily fascinate a novelist, an artist, a choreographer, or a satirist? How much have we missed that has been right before our eyes?

(2) CAN YOU AFFORD COMEDY AT YOUR OWN EXPENSE?

Consider laughter, for a moment, as a little explosion of release that comes when something that might have brought fear, turns out to be harmless. How do you behave when you are on display in a totally unfamiliar situation? Have you anything to lose, really, by your awkwardness? Some people have touchy spots that have to be carefully skirted by their friends lest they become angry: looking back on your own occasions of anger, do they reveal a pattern that indicates similar touchy spots in yourself? If so take down the “God is Love” sign from your mantle and put up instead

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the words: *Count up to Ten Examples*. Next time you feel your temper rising and wish to lash out at another person, please do—but first read the sign you put up and count up to ten examples out of your own past record when you were mistaken in your reasons for anger. As you do this your present anger will change direction and you will find that the only person you still wish to be angry with is yourself for being angry. Another way to neutralize the capacity of our plights and predicaments to make us angry is to make them the source of our comedy. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by a clowning confessional now and then. By so doing, we are reminding our friends of what Montaigne had in mind when he said: “Even if you sit on the highest throne on the world, you still are sitting on your own behind.”

(3) CAN YOU LET YOUR AWKWARDNESS BE KNOWN CHEERFULLY?

The key word here is “cheerfully.” Some people who go too far in displaying their awkwardness are only playing the ancient witch’s game of widdershins at everybody’s expense: that is, they take miserable delight in publicly going out to eat worms. This means they don’t really think they “should” be awkward. Have you considered the universal awkwardness of man and of woman and their capacity for blunder? If you have considered these things long enough you may be less afraid to enter upon challenges where your own awkwardness may appear.

(4) CAN YOU PEACEFULLY MARK TIME BEFORE JUDGING?

The man who is always taking a stand quickly is seldom going anywhere. Sometimes, as we saw before (in number one) he’s too busy showing that he has already been where

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you are going. One sign of strength is the ability to keep moving around among possibilities in peace, when everybody else is standing up to be counted; to postpone action until more facts are in, when others clamor for action. Do you suspend judgment—that is, hang it up for a while to cool? The perfectionist often appears to be suspending judgment when he speaks of “looking at both sides of a question,” but usually you will find that (a) he may be merely weighing which side will be more favorably received; or, (b) he may have decided already which side he is on: remember that “reasoning” is often the activity of finding reasons for going on believing what we do already. What people offer as “both sides” of a question usually resembles, if you look closely, no more than “before and after” pictures of the same dieting woman aided by a little trick photography. A better way, perhaps, is to look for “all sides,” which takes longer, reveals more, provides breathing room for other people who might have much to add and, ultimately, tends toward better human relations.

(5) CAN YOU ADMIT YOUR CHANGES OF MIND CHEERFULLY?

One of the last secrets we may be willing to release about ourselves is the fact—and it *is* a fact if we are growing—that we are forever changing our minds. Of course, no one wants to be known for shilly-shallying, or for barometric changes that depend upon the atmosphere of the day. Yet this quality of changing our mind may constitute one of our points of strength. Erasmus of Rotterdam, perhaps the greatest mind of the Renaissance, was an increasing source of amazement to Martin Luther, who admired him and followed his writings closely. Sometimes Erasmus appeared about to come over to Luther’s point of view; then he would change his mind. This made Luther furious, and he would cry, “Erasmus

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is nothing decided." His frustration over Erasmus's changes of mind so overwhelmed Luther that he used to pray when he went to bed that Erasmus would die. Luther was always "decided"; his mind was always made up and would not change in the presence of new evidence. The strength of Erasmus, who was always "seeing more" and admitting it, was that he could always be believed: he let people know about his changes of mind when they happened. Sometimes those persons we have called "perfect knowers" blind themselves to whatever might force a change of mind. At other times, humiliated by their changes of mind, they conceal them, which ultimately makes for confusion and bewilderment. On the other hand, "imperfect knowers" will give their changes of mind away: "Yesterday I thought that way; now I see differently and here I stand today; as for tomorrow? We shall see." To keep people posted as to where we stand is one of the kindest services we can perform for them.

(6) CAN YOU GET YOURSELF OUT OF FOCUS IN A RELATIONSHIP?

A main reason for our inability to see things very well is that a large segment of our attention is often diverted from the person before us to a concern with our own role in the relationship—that is, what we concentrate on is not the other person at all but rather our own actions and behavior. This self-focus closes us off from experience and makes other people tired. For instance, when visiting a friend how long do you wait before telling your troubles? It is good to wait: for all you know, your friend's house may have just been afire. In general, don't bore your friends with your troubles. Tell them to your enemies: they will be delighted. Getting ourselves out of focus means giving our attention to others and away from ourselves. You have heard, for instance, of the im-

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portance of “drawing people out.” Have you noticed that, instead of drawing others out, most people have the habit of drawing themselves out?

We cannot draw people out so long as we leave them out. Instead, we have to begin by locating them. There they stand, on an opposite hill of life, and with our psychic binoculars we must bring them into focus where they are—and the only way we can do this is by getting ourselves temporarily out of focus. It is only when we readjust our binoculars that we can see them at all. Only then can we arrange to draw them out. When they are seen no longer as a blur in relation to us, they become clearer in relation to themselves. It is then that we discover people in their infinite variety and uniqueness, within their own setting.

Many a person is in this way capable of becoming for us a serialized novel in a distinct setting. Questions arise naturally to our lips on every encounter—we turn our friend from page to page when we can, and he responds like a good book does, because we responded to him. Under these conditions what we regarded earlier as a duty of drawing people out becomes pleasurable. It becomes more than that. We cannot love a person without looking at the object of love. And only when we get ourselves out of focus can we look. Drawing people out in this way is learning how to love.

(7) CAN YOU GIVE YOURSELF AWAY TO SLEEP?

One burden of many perfectionists derives from the fact that they are always “hooked-up,” always connected (especially Understudies). They seldom sleep well. Sleep means dislocation of consciousness. Why is it that our dreams seem like jigsaw puzzles that are apart? We *are* apart—we have given ourselves away.

It is especially hard for compulsive winners, compulsive

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losers, perfect sufferers, and others of similar urgencies to cease during the night the long-joined battle to prove what they must prove. To give ourselves away to sleep, we must once more tackle the job of getting ourselves out of focus. One curious method of doing this sometimes works: when you are lying in bed, close your eyes and picture yourself, continuously and as sharply as you can, as though you were several yards above your own rooftop from which position you can look down, through roof and ceiling to where you lie, down there, asleep. What has happened? You have exercised your imagination to pull yourself momentarily out of focus. Some perfectionists, as it happens, cannot resort to "counting sheep," because their perfect little minds start working at once on how much these sheep would bring in the market. So the best way to give yourself away to sleep is not to be a perfectionist.

(8) CAN YOU GIVE YOURSELF AWAY TO EXPERIENCE?

For a long time it was fashionable to speak of learning "in the school of experience," but no one can learn from experience until he learns how to recognize experience. For example, so long as we hurry to pronounce our opinion and judge things, we disturb experience by advancing the self too soon. Even when traveling, we may be unable to experience anything because we have brought ourselves along. A better way, perhaps, is that of trying to set aside temporarily our own familiar bundle of judging responses to things we see and hear. Something of the flaccidity and absorbent quality of the sponge may not seem dignified, but is very practical to imitate. When we take the sponge attitude, even our sight and hearing seem to improve.

Sometimes, too, the sponge attitude helps us in giving ourselves away to experience. In early summer, for example,

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on every pleasant beach from Maine to California an audience assembles to listen to the sea. Its members may not know that this is their purpose. And yet, like any pious folk on a Sunday morning, they gather under the towering Gothic spires of sea-cliffs, listen to the anthems of wind the sea-caves catch, and make silent offerings to preoccupied gulls.

Unlike most pious folk, however, they quickly divest themselves of their clothing. Instead of sitting rigidly upright as most people do for their religious observances, these people prostrate themselves and lie there for hours, silently, like partakers of a mystery as old as nature, which does not require them to speak or move.

Gulls and cormorants, who make their living among the spires of sea-churches or like mendicants beg their alms around sculptured refectories of rock, find nothing unusual in listening to the sea. For most of us, however, it takes a while to hear the sea properly. At first, we imagine the sea-church confers its benediction without our paying attention. We arrive with sandwich and radio and books we thought we'd read. We anoint our heads with oil, lie down to revolve old problems concerning ourselves, and our lips move in appropriate retorts we wish we had made.

Unwilling to surrender these instruments of our torture, we may for a while be made so apprehensive by the absence of multiple impacts and things to do that we find it hard to lie still at the sea-church.

But the sea still holds an ancient power to make us surrender the instruments and toys we hold dear. One by one, we forget our dials and pages for the primal pounding of surf, for the eternal cacophony of pebbles drawn back by the ebb, for the Circean cries of wind and gull. One by one, we resume our nature in ancient ways that relate us once more, as we were related aeons ago, to the sea. And so we doze,

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and awaken to the musky fragrance of sea and of our bodies; and we are glad of our bodies under the sun and of our quiet way of breathing in rhythms so much like those of the sea. We wander into caves, not as we enter the houses of friends, but more humbly now, with the natural grace of children made glad, now that something within us has listened to the sea—now that we have given ourselves away.

8.

Little Perfectionists of Hearth and Home

ABRUPTLY, BEFORE ANYONE COULD PREPARE A face for such a thing, the beautiful Beverly Hills home exploded. Nothing in my hostess's face the moment before could have warned me, unless it was a certain restless inattention to details as she moved about the room arranging the tea and cakes. She had wanted me to see her home, preparatory to my giving an evening lecture there. Already, I had realized how much the audience would enjoy this peaceful, capacious living room with its floor-to-ceiling windows looking out onto the illuminated pool, the orchid house, and the lawns sloping into rich verdure.

“Such an extraordinary view,” I began when behind me the walls seemed to buckle under sudden vibration. Into the room burst a group of teenagers with bongo drums, led by a faceless, tow-headed youngster who, upon seeing me, cried, “For Crissakes, Ma, we were going to have a session!” As my hostess replied, saying that we would be through in a few minutes, the change in her tone was astonishing. Far

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from carrying rebuke for the interruption, it was tremulously conciliatory, almost pleading. Small wonder that, when they had gone, I had forgotten all about the lecture and asked her about her life with these children.

“Trouble?” She looked surprised. And then, her composure regained, she looked at me fixedly: “I am afraid it is we who are trouble. Didn’t you know? Parents are supposed to hide in the closet.”

For all her implied criticism of this state of affairs, it was evident that her husband and she, in common with a few million other married couples across the country, had gradually come around to hiding in closets of their own homes in order to present their children with a perfect freedom they themselves had never had.

Usually, as happened with these parents, something had gone wrong. Somewhere along the line the tender parental dream of having children who would be perfect angels with new freedoms had turned to disillusion, and the children themselves had become thrusting, pushing, violence-loving, coldly withdrawn and nerveless custodians of a home that had once been their parents’ as well.

How many mothers go heavy-hearted to the counselor, laying before him in bewilderment the fact that their children are growing strangely and growing away? Whether their reaction is anger (“He never got these traits from me!”) or humiliation (“My child seems to be lawless, ungrateful, and contemptuous. . . .”), the chief thing they say they would like to know is: Where have they failed as parents?

Surface reasons are not hard to find, especially if the parents had been guided all along by perfectionist pictures of their children. Perfectionists, whether Masters or Under-studies, tend in their own ways to withdraw from troubles that arise with children: Masters by refusing to acknowledge

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that anything could be wrong; and Understudies by striving a little harder, with private tutors, special courses, counseling, adjurations, showering with gifts, special dispensations, and parental capitulation, in confidence that they will render perfect tomorrow a situation that is rapidly growing worse today. Since both Master and Understudy perfectionists tend to overprotect their children in transparent expiation for a sense of parental failure they cannot acknowledge, the children who can read all this in their parents' faces rapidly become veterans in the game of securing parental cumshaw in exchange for an unverbalized agreement not to become more delinquent than they are now.

Understandable as the parental wish may be to guard children from pain and unpleasantness as long as possible, a deeper reason must be sought for the psychic ownership of millions of parents by their children today. To a great extent, we are still products of the romantic tradition with its idea that childhood is the best time of life. Our verbal expressions about childhood, our nostalgia about the time of childhood as somehow being "best," did not have their origin with us. When we say: "He was a perfect child"—"If only she could have remained a child"—"Too bad they have to grow up," we are echoing ideas that would have been unthinkable in most periods of human history. The Greeks saw their children as fragments of adulthood, the medieval people believed children were "born tatched," our own Colonial forebears regarded them as "born foolish." Such sentiments, however, never captured our imagination so much as the eighteenth-century romantic theory that the child was "born perfect." Perhaps the attractiveness of the theory made it seem more plausible to us. A more likely reason for its appeal, however, is that these romantics, forever running to find perfect places and perfect feelings, were in a pickle similar to that in which

we find ourselves today. They were sick of themselves. There developed around Rousseau's favorite idea that human beings are "condemned" to be imperfect as adults a certain repugnance, as though somehow man was intended to be a finer creature, unalloyed by baser materials. Why should he suffer eternally the fate of Adam, who had fallen from his high estate? As these people watched the perfect child dwindle into flawed adulthood, they cried "If only we could remain childlike!" For to them the child had become the symbol of that perfection which adulthood was shortly to contaminate.

Never was there such an age of child-watchers, worshippers and protectors. Rousseau had set the stage. Early in his adult life he had been shocked to see the constraints laid upon children who were in those days pompadoured, gilded, powdered, and even forced to wear swords; he noticed girls six years old bound in whalebone, wearing rouge, never seeing their busy mothers. Bridling from the extremes he saw, he wrote *Emile* in 1762, one of the most infectious books of the age, in which he implored people to give the world over to the only persons who were truly natural—the children. Let them run free, he cried. "Discipline degrades and blasts," he wrote in *Emile*; further he urged the parents of his age to stop thrusting books upon the child: "They come between the child and things of nature." Within twelve years of the publication of this book, a school called the Philanthropinum was founded in Germany by Basedow for the sole purpose of helping the child remain a child. By excursions into the woods, denial of visits by contaminated creatures called adults, a withdrawal of books, and a general program for learning through play and laughter, the children of this extraordinary school were watched and studied and

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elevated onto little psychic pedestals of every description, on the theory that if they could be protected from the evils of adult society their natural goodness would unfold. The cult of the child caught the fancy and fired the imagination everywhere. Coleridge wrote of his own child: "But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze by lakes and sandy shore." In Maturin's novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*, the perfect child was reared on a desert island and "lived like a flower . . . blooming in the light and bending to the shower."

Soon enough, it was argued, the child would come down from his height of perfection to mule and puke as a helpless adult in the arms of his nurse, civilization. "We must admit," said Hawkesworth, "that the child is happier than the man." Wordsworth, who wanted his own grandchildren to be educated by "running wild," wrote some of the saddest lines ever composed about the plight of poor, inferior adulthood:

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light
.

At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day."

For him, as for millions of other persons who absorbed the romantic theory of life, the child was indeed the father of the man.

What has all this to do with us? Perhaps the question were better phrased: what has it *not* to do with us? Unhappy adults today, jilted and disappointed in their faith that tail-fins meant elevation, that a dentrifice meant a smile, that

marriage meant companionship, have turned once more to look to the child as "best." In our own schools we have sought to adjust the "whole child" to enjoy childhood without pain. The whole child must be kept happy, no matter what happens to the fragmented adult, for childhood will never come again. One might picture the relative position of children and adults today as a pyramid, with the child at the top in the sunlight, and all the adults struggling down on the bottom, exhausted, disillusioned from the effects of their problems, wishing they could somehow get up the pyramid to the height of childhood.

Since they can't, in anybody's respectable universe, adopt the clothing and the voices of children, they will do the next best thing: they will *live for* the child. They will orient their habits, their household, and their personal life to the needs, the wishes, the babblings, and the bongos of the little angel.

Soon the little angel behaves strangely in his heaven. Having grown up in a world that celebrated children and left adulthood looking moldy, dulled, unappetizing, and otherwise crippled from the effects of keeping the child-paradise going, the growing child sees little in adulthood he wants to grow toward. By his nature he is in an "on the mark, get set attitude" but the spectacle of adult life shows him nothing toward which he really wants to go.

Furthermore, what happens to the little angel when he loses his heaven? Having been favored as a child, having been sole owner of grounds and houses when he was a child, he is apt to experience in maturity the tragic results of expecting to find a world that likewise will favor him. Coddled, adjusted, integrated, and otherwise psychically emasculated, he wanders with growing dissatisfaction among the advertised toys of adult life and then turns with others to join

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in that remarkable processional pilgrimage known as earlier marriage, and starts the whole process over again by living through *his* children. And nothing, exactly nothing, can be more ridiculous than the spectacle of one child living through another child.

Perhaps we have our orientation backward. So far as we know, adults were not intended to yearn upward toward childhood. Nor were children intended to look down from a height on adults. Children seem to grow best when they have before their eyes the incentive to grow up toward an exciting and fulfilling world of adult life.

If this is so, it is time to reverse the pyramid—to set it on its apex, with the child at the bottom, and to render adult life at the top healthier in its joys and employments so as to make the child want to climb up the pyramid. Otherwise expressed: Don't make angels of your children for then they will run you; give them something in adulthood worth aspiring to, and then they will climb up to you.

This is by no means a new idea. Recent excavations in garbage dumps outside ancient Greek towns have disclosed what apparently were primary-school wastebaskets, crammed with exercise books and one almost perfectly preserved primary-school textbook. From these, as well as from other emerging evidence, an almost unbelievable picture is forming of how children were treated in the early world.

Most startling of the disclosures is that children seemed to thrive under conditions that we today would regard as traumatizing to the little angels' psyches. For one thing, in all of ancient Athens it is hard to find that little angel of the progressive educators' idolatry known today as the "whole child." Instead there are whole adults, living out their lives as richly and as fully as they can. They are con-

cerned that the yearning fragments they have called children will be attracted toward adult wholeness. It is the adults who are high on the pyramid. It is they who are smiling down upon the children with a teasing manner which says, "Catch up to us, if you can!"

Hundreds of tiny bobbing lights can be seen pinpointing the predawn darkness in Athens; and if we look closely, each light reveals a child who is being carried to school on the shoulders of a slave-servant called the "pedagogue." In the dim light provided by his lantern of translucent horn casings enclosing olive oil we notice that the pedagogue has already begun instructing the child. Much that is taught has to do with the child's responsibility for safeguarding the joys of adult life by controlling his temper, not speaking 'til spoken to, rising when an adult enters. Then after school another procession of pedagogues and children streams toward the theater where the child will learn something more about the primal excitement of being an adult. One old pedagogue's words have come down to us from this ancient time: "My duty it is to make excellence desirable to children." Now you can see why it is that nowhere in Greek literature do we find preserved the "bright sayings" of children. No children are put on exhibition nor expected to be original. They are not overpraised, nor pampered, nor allowed to run the family. More importantly, nowhere do we find evidence of Greek people desiring to be children again. On the contrary, their yearning, as expressed in a hundred places in surviving literature, is for "sophrosyne," or wholeness, for the harmonious activation of all parts of their adult lives.

What is significant is that the ancient Greeks had their pyramids inverted, with all the fun of adulthood celebrated in the wide life at the top. As for the child, living in the nar-

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row chink at the bottom, he had his games, his play, and even his own special holidays (his birthday, the day his hair was cut); but as for his status, he was never allowed to suppose that he was anywhere else than at the bottom of a challenging pyramid of life. No child in Athens was confronted by a lusterless, mournful-eyed adult saying "I gave my life for you." Rather, he was likely to hear: "Look at the fun we have up here! Grow up to us, if you can!"

So long as we do not reverse our own pyramid, we will continue in that peculiar romantic design of making little angels to worship in compensation for a life not lived, a design that has cost us dearly and may cost our children dearly tomorrow.

Any number of angel types are being prepared today for unhappiness as they grow up to take their places before the television dials of the future. One notices, for example, the "home angel." This docile child is often to be found in the living room where, neutralized and "minded" by an electronic baby-sitter, he is absorbing bloody war and guntoting violence for the sake of parental peace and quiet. So comfortably adjusted is this child as a continuing foetus in a protective society that he never quite leaves home. For another example, there is the "group angel." He is a perfect "belonger," who has been adjusted, integrated, put through programs of orientation, group centerment, remotivation, functionalization, and general pauperization of human uniqueness. His life has been thus far without trauma or fright of discovered awkwardness, or that pitiful, lonely and perilous individualism to which some of his forebears were condemned. David Riesman, in *The Lonely Crowd*, had him in mind when he noted, "Today all little pigs go to market; none stay home; all have roast beef if any do and all say 'wee-

wee.’’ This little angel will never leave the group. He will always be found perfectly conforming to group standards, costume and facial habiliments. As he grows older he may even feign individualism by becoming a political leftist or a beatnik, but nothing has changed. He continues to be a groupist among other “wee-wee’rs” with pamphlet and beard.

For still another example, we have the “angel-poser.” This child is usually a refugee from “smother-love” who has learned the art of deception so thoroughly that he has never really been home. When his mother asks, “You do love your mother, don’t you?” one of the earliest demanded social lies, he has learned to say “yes.” Neither he nor his parents are aware that the obligation to love kills the capacity, and that he is thus being trained as an angel-poser, a perfectionist of deception, whose poverty will consist in the fact that he will be unable to love. Lying, he has learned, is a means of warding off the blows of life: the child may want to be truthful, but on the other hand he has no wish to be rejected. Moreover, the life of fragmented adults offers to the whole child so many good examples of effective commercial and social lying that his education advances rapidly. Father, when he finds out who is ringing on the phone, calls to his wife, “Tell him we’re going out for the evening”; and when the phone contains another petitioner, “Tell them to come right on over; we’re free for the evening.” When Helen Parkhurst, famous for her studies of child behavior, asked one group of children whether they or adults were better liars, she received an interesting answer: “Adults are better at it, because they’ve had more experience.”

All in all, these angels produced in consequence of modern theories of the child seem to have one thing in common: a general repugnance for adult life and a corollary unwilling-

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ness to relinquish the roles of childhood. The crucial, commonly ignored fact would seem to be that angel-making cripples tomorrow's living. When the home angel loses his mother, what marriage partner can ever quite take her place? When the group angel falls out of favor, how will he fare without a group? We may recoil on learning that the ancient Greeks used to expose newly born infants who were found to have physical deformities, that they left them outside the city gates in a pot to die; and yet it is not impossible that we are doing much the same thing—putting him outside the gates of reality as a little perfectionist in a pot we made, with the result that our going away exposes him to a world for which he is not prepared. We have forgotten that today's children are tomorrow's adults, and we have not helped the child to desire to grow into that world of tomorrow.

The greatest inducement to growth in children is the privilege of being around exciting parents—parents who help kindle desire in children by enjoying themselves as “whole” adults. It is no sign of health to expect providence, creature comfort, or special schooling to give the child an appetite for adult roles in life when, as the child can plainly see, these roles are not particularly enjoyable to the adults themselves. As noted earlier in this chapter, the concern of the Greeks was to help “fragments” of adults (children) want to become “whole” adults. Among the romantics of the eighteenth century we saw an opposite concern—that of fragmented adults who tried to become whole children. Although this latter design for the pyramid of life brought tears of admiration to our tender-minded ancestors, who thought it a beautiful idea, it is not known that it did much for the children.

We cannot know for sure what the ancient Greeks would think of us today. It is not unlikely, however, that they would

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suggest we clobber the kids who try to own the pyramid before they have made the climb, and in general make them *want* the climb by showing through the conduct of our adult lives that we enjoy the reward of having climbed the pyramid ourselves.

9.

Jealousy and the Perfectionist Shadow

FEW PERSONS SEE SO POORLY AS THOSE WHOSE outlook is darkened as a result of jealousy. Not by accident were the slatted shutters in early France known as "jalousie"—for they kept out the light. Similarly, those oddly twisted ribbed-glass windows in early European houses were called "jealous-glass." Such names were well chosen. Whenever a person becomes jealous, the shutters of his mind begin to close. His eyes take on the opacity of jealous-glass, and he begins to exhibit in his behavior one of the darkest, least understood and most dangerous psychic conditions known to man.

And almost nothing is known about the nature of jealousy!

At first glance, jealousy would not seem to be so dangerous. Perfectionists, of all people the most liable to the development of a jealous disposition, always have found good reasons to support their belief, in their writings and general statements, that jealousy is a natural, if repellent, consequence of being in love under certain frustrating conditions. From what

we have seen of the perfectionist's need to disavow any character flaws, we can be fairly safe in assuming that the last thing a jealous perfectionist would do would be to declare that his "love" had become contaminated by "sickness." He may once have thought that jealousy in other persons was a sign of weakness. In his own affliction, however, he discovers grounds for believing that jealousy is natural, necessary, and even a guarantee of the depth and sincerity of his love.

Moreover, the whole subject of jealousy in our culture has remained under a jealous-glass covering, set in place by the perfectionists, and all we can ordinarily discern in the resultant twilight is a haze of misunderstandings. Almost nothing has been written on jealousy. Even the encyclopedia, which will provide you with many paragraphs on the nature of a geranium, has very little to say about jealousy. Such definitions as have been attempted have usually avoided coming to terms with the specific cluster of qualities that distinguish jealous responses from other forms of emotional activity. They have, instead, merely suggested that jealousy is like something else, which, in its turn, is not well defined. When Arnold Jessel, for example, defines jealousy as a "brand of fear," it is like telling Socrates that Chesterfield is a brand of cigarettes, for this information would be of no use to him. That is to say, it would tell him nothing about the properties peculiar to Chesterfields, nor would it tell him what cigarettes are. Again, Bertrand Russell once characterized jealousy as "a special form of envy—the envy of love." But this defined neither envy nor love. Much earlier in history Anatole France said jealousy was "the wounding of self-love," John Dryden said it was "the tyrant of the mind," and Shakespeare called it "the green-eyed monster." In other words we are given to understand that jealousy is love, fear, envy, a wound,

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a tyrant, and a monster, and this is about all we can make out in the twilight of jealousy under glass.

Nevertheless, it is time to lift the jealous-glass cover that perfectionists have placed on this great crippler of human relations. It is time to acquaint ourselves with the nature and the general havoc in our society produced by jealousy.

Strange as it may appear, in view of the fact that so little has been written about it, jealousy in human life has many of the characteristics of the great bubonic plague in 1347. Then, millions of persons were dying of a disease nobody understood, which brought forth a number of gowned authorities to explain why the plague was necessary. While the death-tumbrils filled, and the crosses of death were chalked on the doors of the afflicted, and the sails of ghost ships slatted above the dying crews at sea, and the millions of people fled from one silent city to another spreading the contagion, all the gowned explainers of what is right and good were busy finding enemies to blame. As we saw earlier, they blamed the stars, they blamed the Jews, they blamed the women. They came out with thousands of prescriptions guaranteed to arrest the plague at your door. They proclaimed that all houses should be rebuilt to face north, and that inside the poor folk should burn mastic, laurel, and costus, and then they should go outside to the shrine which would further protect them, and drink holy water out of church bells since this water would preserve them from later exposure. Those whom the plague claimed had not found the right mastic, or had found the wrong shrine, or had neglected to take Bishop Hake's admonition to eat a fig before breakfast. Nowhere did the authorities admit that the plague was out of their control, nor did they lower their sights to find out by experiment what the plague might be.

Human jealousy, in the homes of millions of people

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throughout the centuries, has had the character of a plague in miniature. Its power to infect good will, to blast marriages, to hamper and thwart human liberty, and to narrow the employments of human energy to the stockpiling of means for reprisal has been evident in every town and hamlet of the Western world. As was true of the bubonic plague, disaster at home has invariably brought forth a perfectionist authority to show that jealousy was necessary, and then at once to resort to the ancient task of finding enemies to blame. Seldom have people looked under the jealous-glass to discover that this plague was out of their control, nor have they lowered their sights to discover that jealousy is not caused by love, by devotion, but rather may be a disease that needs to be examined.

Here, as with many of our problems, it is the perfectionist's need to conceal personal flaws and dignify his action that has prevented us from lifting off the jealous-glass to learn what jealousy is about. As quickly as we try, the perfectionist has rushed forward to explain why jealousy is something other than it is.

For jealousy is the perfectionist's own disease. Wherever you find jealousy, you are likely to find the perfectionist standing around with his pictures of the perfect and his demand that people he claims to love behave according to the pictures he has made of them. Of all humankind, the perfectionist is the man with the greatest feeling of entitlement to require that people respond in a certain way. The rising young executive has made a picture of his next step in promotion; should anyone take this place, which he has already etched into actuality in his mind, he will be jealous. The possessive mother has made a picture of her son as a loving companion through the years; no matter how deserving may be the younger woman who carries her son away in marriage,

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this mother will be jealous. The perfectionist lover has made a picture of the woman he wants for his own; and even though she may not know of his need or his picture of her, she is in trouble if her behavior does not sooner or later conform to the picture of her etched in his mind, for he will be jealous. In all such instances as these, the basic spring-board of jealousy is the conviction of entitlement.

When our greatest English lyric poet, John Keats, decided that he loved the beautiful girl next door in Hamstead, it was not long before he was making perfectionist pictures of her. As he dressed up in his best clothes to write he found it worthwhile to note down these words: "Love is my Religion!" This meant that Fanny Brawne, the girl next door, had to worship the picture he had made, for we find no evidence of Keats' telling her "Love is *our* religion." Here, of course, is one basic trouble with the whole romantic movement, because every time a poet breathed down a girl's neck with the idea that they were "two souls with but a single thought," she soon learned that the single thought was really his.

In the relationship that developed between Keats and Fanny Brawne, the young poet was soon in trouble. She adored his silly head, but she did not worship his religion: she loved to dance and be flirtatious, but these were not in the picture frame he had made for her existence. It was not long before he had the jealous-glass look, and was talking to her at length about the importance in her life of liberty and fraternity so long as she would not exercise these things. Keats was very young, of course, and the final years of his life—he died at twenty-five—were ones of recurrent torture because of Fanny's failure to live in accordance with his pictures.

An uncommon burden is imposed on the loved one trapped

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in a perfectionist's picture frame. Certainly Fanny couldn't get out. Her own vitality demanded the playfulness that made her feel guilty and unworthy whenever she looked into his accusing eyes. He would write to her such lines as these: "Do not think of anything but me!" Once, tormented for days by the thought of her going to a masked shepherdess ball, he wrote to her: "If you could really... enjoy yourself at a party—if you can smile in people's faces... you never have nor ever will love me." But the final command for her to stay within the frame of his perfectionist picture was contained in one sentence he wrote to her in his misery: "You must be mine to die upon the rack if I want you to. . . ."

As was evident from these lines, no less burdensome is the fate of the perfectionist when his picture is shattered. His loss is real. Keats, the Understudy perfectionist in love, meant every word he said when he wrote to her: "If you should ever feel for man at the first sight... [what] I felt for you, I am lost." He meant it when he said, "In case of the worst that can happen, I shall still love you—but what hatred shall I have for another!" And this was true. If she could not conform, he would suffer. In fact, Keats suffered so greatly from fear of losing Fanny Brawne that his emotional system could not hold up under the shock of having her in the same room with him, and finally his friends had to contrive to get him away from her next-doorness by taking him off to Italy.

One of the most diabolical sequences of jealousy in all the books of man is the one in which Shakespeare's Iago turns Othello against his wife. What he does is to plant in Othello's mind "dangerous conceits" or suggestive, imaginary scenes of betrayal—whose cumulative effect is to shatter the picture Othello has of his beloved's faithfulness. If Othello cherished Desdemona before, he ceases to do so when the old pictures are shattered and replaced by the new. In the famous accu-

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sation scene, his is jealous-glass behavior; and Desdemona, shocked, bewildered, and caught in the terrible hypnotic mood that comes into the room with him, seems to echo it. Asked how she feels the moment Othello has gone, she answers: "Faith, half asleep." What has dazed her and dislocated her sense of reality is not so much her husband's accusation that she is unfaithful—this she could cope with; it is rather that he has become a stranger in his jealousy. Not once in the entire scene does he ask her whether what he has heard about her is false. Othello has lived by the pictures in his mind. So long as nothing shattered his perfect picture of his wife, he behaved lovingly. But Iago knows, fiendish realist that he is, that all that is needed to change Othello's "love" is to change his picture, and Othello will automatically move to strangle his wife. Worst of all, Iago knows that from the moment Othello's perfect picture is shattered to the moment of murder he will not ask his wife if her infidelity be true or not. As Iago knew, jealous persons do not love other people: they love only the pictures of what they feel entitled to receive from others.

From the foregoing it may seem to you, as it does to me, that jealousy is an expression of the *fear of loss of what we hunger for, that we feel entitled to*. Our clue word here is *entitlement*. We are not jealous because of our love for another. Our jealousy comes from a warped and sickly love for the perfectionist pictures we carry with us, as well as from rage that persons and events do not conform to our pictures. We hunger for life to match what we have pictured; and when we fear that we are losing what we have demanded as our due, we suffer the pangs of jealousy.

Where does it start? Everywhere in nature you can find instances of jealous reactions. Some of them are simple and temporary. On mornings when writing on the stern deck of

the *Panacea*, for example, I violate the yachtsman's code by throwing bread to the seagulls. Numbering the swift arrivals who wait on the water astern of me are the white, older gulls who take up the center positions, and the gray younger gulls who float alertly but obediently at a distance. All these bobbing adherents to protocol understand that the older white gulls are entitled to eat while the grays are entitled to nothing. Since this offended a sense of fair play in me, I used to try to throw crumbs to the underprivileged, but it never worked. I would wait until the closest white seagull was floating in such a sea of crumbs as he could never finish. Even though the white gull had before him all the food he could possibly want, the moment a gray one twenty feet away tried to snatch a crumb the white gull with a scream would try to tear his wings and gouge him to death.

Such moods of outraged entitlement are, at least among seagulls, completely dependent upon their being hungry at that moment. Once the white gulls have eaten all they want, they seem to lose their memory of what food is. They cease to care who enjoys food around them.

Another and slightly more complex example of outraged entitlement can be seen in the dog—and, it might be added, in certain jealous husbands. So strong is the dog's sense of entitlement that he will start eating ravenously the food he's long been tired of just because another dog wants it. These jealous reactions are also fairly universal among human beings and are frequently regarded by psychologists today as normal. What matters, in our human behavior, is what we do after these reactions, and what we have been thinking and doing about such reactions over the years.

For here's the rub: Man has trouble with his hungers. Unlike the seagull he does not fly off when he has had enough. On the contrary, he remembers and imagines and conceives of

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a future time. Gulls and cormorants do not seem to fear to-morrow, but man with his memory and his foresight lives in such a world of extension that he can remember what he wanted, he can dream of what he will want, and with his mental pictures he can construe an elaborate set of convictions as to what he "should" have for his proper survival. Man's sense of entitlement, especially if he is a perfectionist, can grow out of all proportion to what anyone could expect to gain from life or people. He even is capable of orienting his whole life around the goal of destroying that which, much earlier in his life, had outraged his sense of entitlement: and, what is worse, he may not be aware of his purpose.

So elaborate is our structure of approved attitudes today, however, that even if the perfectionist becomes aware of his own jealous motivations there are usually any number of acceptable explanations by which his outraged entitlement can be effectively rationalized.

Some people, for example, who feel entitled to occupy the crow's-nest on the social ladder and fail to do so, in spite of meticulous efforts to conform to group standards and to exhibit among their possessions the "decent expensiveness" of which Veblen spoke, have an easy excuse for their raging jealousy against those who did make it: they can simply declare those other people are social climbers blind to the existence of the truly deserving.

By far the most serious problems of jealousy arise among people who are not especially concerned with the ownership of social position or of physical possessions: they are perfectionists who feel entitled to the ownership of human beings. Here the jealous person weaves an invisible web of hatred and resentment around the person to be owned. But the web is never quite completed. For the contrivances of human nature to escape such webs spring from deep unconscious-

ness with a show of subtle strength that cannot be matched by the predatory will of these binders of the psyche. All of them—mothers who must own sons or daughters, wives who must own husbands, husbands who must own wives—will by nature's contrivances fail to gain the object of their will to bind. From these failures erupt the more sensational kinds of overt and covert violence that, taken all together, would seem to render jealousy the most venomous and vile order of crime on this earth.

What possible rationalizations could be advanced by these patient and unsleeping binders of others' psyches? How could they show their conduct to be justifiable?

In persons having a jealous disposition there exists the simplest and most ingenious rationalization of all: the claim to love. Wherever jealous perpetrators of violence have been brought to judgment, their claim to have acted because of their love has somehow served to soften the force of justice. Moreover, ever since the romantic age jealousy has been regarded among young people as a kind of thermometer by which to gauge the heat of love. It seems strange, today, to see that old Maeterlinck play in which Golande, strangling his wife with his hands, relinquishes his grip long enough to cry: "Tell me if you've loved another. I want the truth. I love you so." Jealousy is expected in love, and, for all the violence that it has led to, is still today regarded as a "proof" of caring.

Small wonder, considering this view of "love," that the very quality in the possessive person that will prove terrifying later begins by being charming and a little flattering. How many women have tried provoking and taunting men to jealousy to test their love? Actually, if they knew the roots of jealousy, their pleasure in the lover's jealous-glass look

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would quickly turn to revulsion. And if they saw in the years ahead the effects of jealousy—the deadly psychic battles to come between the compulsive owner and the will-not-be-owned—their relish would turn to dread, and they would put themselves beyond the reach of jealous eyes. They would know that these eyes are unseeing, unloving and, like the French jealous-glass, capable of cutting when they are shattered. Fortunate is the girl who has learned, while there is yet time for decisions, that when the jealous male looks in her eyes with love what he loves there is not her, but the image of himself in her eyes.

Taken all in all, the quality of our jealousy may depend upon the nature of our pictures of what life "should" contain for us. What do we accept or reject as portions of our entitlement in life? What do our pictures tell us? That we need to own things for our proper survival? Do we need to own the psyche of an adult or a child for survival?

It would seem that love is not the cause of jealousy after all; on the contrary, it is often the method of its prevention. The more we love—and I mean here simply the keen joy of assisting people to grow their own way—the less we will be jealous of what we love. As life goes on many persons do learn to develop a capacity for loving many persons and many things, and they are spared the harsher conflicts which otherwise accrue between desire and possession. As for the person who has come to age loving little in life, his misery is only made worse when he fastens upon another person and calls it "falling in love." Because his desires and attainments have been few he comes to love empty and it is not long before the object of his desire becomes his "whole world." How revealing this phrase is! For it tells us, in effect, that this lover had no world before. All his anxious hungering

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after reality comes now to be focused and dependent upon the "loved one" for its satisfaction. This is sometimes more than the recipient can stand, especially as the hunger for possession moves on to its more pathological development in the web-making of jealousy.

10.

How Not to Collide with Ourselves

YES, JANE SMITH WAS IN, AND WOULD BE GLAD TO meet us; but the girl who advanced into the living room wore a leaden scowl and her voice was scornful when she said, "I'm Jane Smith." Behind her stood another girl whose provocative, slow smile betokened amorous promise and who whispered, "I'm Jane Smith." As we sat down in bewilderment, there appeared a charmingly gay, angelic-looking girl who told us how delighted she would be to serve us tea, "For, you see, I'm Jane Smith." Stunned among these strange bearers of the same name, we arose to find crouching on the floor before us a creature scarcely human, with dank hair matting a furrowed and despairing face, who barely managed to mutter through dried lips, "I'm Jane Smith."

We looked around us, wonderingly. "Do you all live together? Are you all Jane Smith?" And they all nodded.

That several persons can appear to dwell under the same name is more than a curious puzzle of psychology: in the lives of persons today it is often an embarrassing problem.

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In earlier times, encouraged by Henley's famous lines, "I am the master of my fate, and the captain of my soul," people used to venture into solitude cheerfully, confident that they would find themselves and become their own captains. Now, however, fewer persons are quite sure just who the captain is in internal life. Those who go off to find themselves may come back silently, for what they found was not a self but selves. They had heard about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde; they may have remembered that great cry of Faust, "Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast, apart"; and they may even have been moved by the problem described in *Three Faces of Eve*. They were not prepared, however, to find several selves contending for their own name.

What shall we do with such knowledge? In the zoo near the harbor where I live is a two-headed snake that is confusing to watch, for each of its active little heads appears to have its own feeding system and habits of responding. More confusing, however, can be the discovery that we have two heads ourselves, with different feeding systems, different ways of speaking, listening, and feeling—and, worst of all, unpredictable habits of colliding over their separate urgencies. Of all our discoveries about ourselves, the fact that we collide with ourselves seems a problem most needful of hiding.

Most of our collisions in life are private affairs quickly hidden from view. Suddenly, on one of our greater freeways, a six-car pileup transfixes a number of people in the attitudes they had at impact. A radio is still playing in one of the half-crushed cars. A cigarette lies on the flooring, half smoked. The newspapers will carry the story, but only the participants will ever know the sensations felt; and even the evidence will soon be hidden. Within an hour all the wreckage will have been cleared away and thousands of autos will

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be pushing on again, their occupants unaware that death and injury contended on that road. Radios will be playing, cigarettes will be smoked, and the scene will have disappeared.

Often these features of physical collisions seem to have their counterpart in internal conflicts. When an old temper self wrecks our good intentions, when a hateful self smashes our likeable self driving toward kindness, we tend to clear away from consciousness as quickly as possible the wreckage of our collision on our own psychic freeway.

Nothing, of course, is completely hidden. A skilled highway patrolman can tell where a collision has occurred by the swerve marks, the scoring of jagged metal in concrete, that cannot be cleaned away. Sometimes, too, the psychologist can notice, in the behavior of a person who has suffered interior collisions, the telltale evidence of swerve marks that cannot be cleaned away. Often the victim of inner collision suffers from pre-exhaustion: loss of incentive to take to the road again. A certain lack of luster, an inability to find energy in beginning new projects, seems to dog him wherever he goes. Sometimes inner collisions have left their victim with the worst swerve marks of all: loss of the "will to live"; that is to say, he is out of G.A.S., which is medical jargon for the General-Adaptation-Syndrome, the collaborating system of inner checks and balances that keep us going. But even if most interior collisions are less severe, their swerve marks are seldom hidden, and linger on in contradictory behavior that troubles the sufferer and especially his friends.

One day a New York publisher looked up from his desk to find a strange gentleman sitting opposite regarding him with an intense gaze. The publisher waited. The man waited, then finally said, "I'm Poe."

"Well," said the publisher, "Very glad to meet you."

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“You are going to publish,” said Poe, “the greatest book of this century. I’ve just finished it.” Now the book, as it turned out, was not one of the author’s best, but the publisher resolved to print it. When Poe returned, anxious as to the fate of his book, his eyes were wan and his face livid; he was trembling; he begged and implored: “Please, I need money now, or I can’t live any longer.” Shortly afterward, however, when the publisher got hold of Poe to grant his request, Poe was humiliated by the offer of help. “I don’t need money!” he cried. “I have all kinds of money!”

To his friends it seemed that Poe had several selves: one was a beggar, another a martinet, a third was a prideful self. The swerve marks of these colliding selves were apparent to all who knew him. Edgar begged, Allan demanded, and Poe was humiliated. Anguished and exhausted from fear of unpredictable forces within, hungry for artificial stimuli by which to achieve a self-regard he could not maintain, Poe was a difficult man for anyone to relate to. You never knew which self would arrive nor how long it would stay in the room. Poe, a mysterious cluster of unidentified flying objects, could be fascinating to people for a while, but they soon came to be angry or terrified and, finally, eager for escape.

Most of us have known unhappy persons who gave us, on different days, such contrary sets of responses that we questioned their honesty and set them down as “two-faced.” Then came our discovery that they really didn’t know their own second face. Much earlier, perhaps, they had known about it; but it belonged to a self they didn’t like. So they had quickly shoved this poor-relations self out of house and out of consciousness. And now, unknown to them, it keeps coming back again, controverting what they said yesterday and spoiling tomorrow what they will do today. Watching such havoc, we may even begin to wonder about our own

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interior collisions: must we, at unexpected points in our lives, become their victims? Or is there something to be learned by which the greater part of the collisions on our own psychic freeway could be avoided?

More than anything else, we need to recognize that we collide with ourselves when we have not introduced our poor-relations selves and made room for them. Our table may have been set for the selves we show off, but not for those that show up. Perfectionists, especially, are so anxious to hide their poor-relations selves that they are obliged to obliterate them from consciousness. Their vulnerability is the likelihood that they will suffer from internal collision and never know what hit them. Chronically angry with other people without cause, they will be weary with themselves without knowing why.

Perhaps the simplest way to reduce our psychic collisions and thus spare our friends their consequences is to invite our poor-relations selves to dinner—and then, very politely, get acquainted with their habits. When Bernard Shaw said, “If you have a skeleton in your closet, you may as well make it dance,” he was not fooling. Certainly, it is better for an undesirable self to dance before us than behind our back. Not only will we be safer companions for our friends and associates if we know where our unwanted selves are and how they are likely to behave; but also these selves will do far less damage on the freeways of our actions than when they have grown strong on secret nourishment in the closet of our unconscious.

A young executive in a company where social acceptability weighed heavily for higher advancement was in a peculiar sort of downright trouble. At every social function there came a moment when his voice grew loud with argument, and he dropped a little lower in the estimate of his asso-

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ciates and their watchful wives. His way of bursting with anger into the warm exchanges of an evening was all the more strange because his outbursts concerned issues in themselves not nearly so important to him as getting along better with his associates.

When I suggested that he introduce this peculiar self into his closer acquaintance—find out what its eating habits are and when it acts up—he at first smilingly dismissed the proposal as altogether too simple and proposed instead that a good recumbent year before a psychoanalyst would be better. Nevertheless, perhaps from amusement at the macabre idea of his having a poor-relations self that showed up uninvited, he began to seek it out. To his surprise, it was truly a self with its own visceral arrangement, bone and marrow, and its own special time for speaking. One condition always set it off—that of losing an argument. It would never show up when talk was casual and evenly matched. Only when he had “no argument” to offer would this other self argue for him, angrily and imperiously.

To tell his friends directly about his other self might have sounded too silly. But suddenly, a few evenings later, he found another way. Someone in the discussion had just conceded that he had made a good point. “Yes, I think I have,” he responded, glancing about the group of guests at table. Eyes twinkling, he added: “You’ll know when I haven’t got a good point: I’ll be talking louder.” There was a moment of shocked silence, for what he had said was painfully true; and then came the release of laughter. He had, at last, introduced his poor-relations self at dinner before it had introduced him.

Certainly, it is no sign of weakness to have poor-relations selves: everybody has them. “There’s no arguing with Johnson,” Oliver Goldsmith once said of the famous writer, “for

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if his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt end of it." Sigmund Freud was no exception. Most of his admirers would like to forget his poor-relations self that used to thrust forward in times of personal disappointment. The swerve marks from his own inner collisions could be observed in his pitiless, corrosive diatribes against his former friends Dr. Carl Jung, Dr. Alfred Adler and others. Even that George Washington of the cherry tree who allegedly said, "Father, I cannot tell a lie," had a poor-relations self that might have chopped down father. Once, it nearly chopped down his friend Tom Paine, languishing under sentence of death in a Paris prison for lack of an official request to Robespierre that might have set him free.

While we can be glib in describing the ease with which other people might profitably introduce their poor-relations selves, it is always, unfortunately, a stinging slap to our vanity when we trace down the living-habits of our own. If we happen to see ourselves as humanitarian, it is disconcerting to find a fibrous, breathing self that hates people. Who wants to find a martinet self that goes its own way to keep people in line? Or a jealous self that signalizes the poverty of its possessor? Or a vengeful self that never lets an old wound heal but finds its hour for reprisal? Each one of these slaps hard when it is brought to dine.

And yet each is the kind of slap from which nature permits us to recover with surprising alacrity. Behind the theory that confession is "good for the soul" lies recognition that to speak of a condition may help to neutralize it. What is not easy to recover from, however, is the collisional havoc brought by our unintroduced selves, for they leave their toll in exhaustion, fear, and loss of faith in our own capacity to deal effectively with life situations.

Significantly, when we introduce our poor-relations selves,

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when we say, "Here comes my vanity" before our vanity has spoken, these selves begin to lose the momentum for collision with the selves we like to show. In the practice of jujitsu the greatest aggression is to go along with the momentum of your oncoming opponent. Not by thrusting him out but rather by taking him in is he thrown off balance. An ancient saying, "You can't destroy your enemies unless you love them," is an oddly-turned expression of the same principle. Neither counsels that we "give in" to forces we do not want in our lives. On the contrary, one of the most aggressive actions against them is to go along with them a little of the way. Similarly, we cannot afford not to get acquainted with our poor-relations selves. For to dine with them thus is to begin to starve them.

Of course there is, unfortunately, another problem. As you may have noticed, we have been reckoning thus far without the perfectionists. Some of them, Understudies especially, love to indulge in confessionals that have the ring of authenticity and which they come to believe themselves. Proud of their humility, they take relish in introducing their poor-relations selves, only to ignore their guests the moment they have introduced them and go on behaving as before. Since in human nature one of the most ingenious ways of hiding a truth is to speak of it, we are confronted with a second challenge if we are to reduce the collisions within. One of the greatest favors we can confer on other people, and on ourselves, is to remember before making pronouncements all the voices that come out of us. That man is a judging animal is no secret: we judge from morning til night. As Socrates had his agora, or market place, as an arena for his judgments, so we have our telephone. Unlike Socrates, however, we may often forget what we said yesterday with another voice from another self. This can be hard on other people. When they

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think they have got to the root of us, the root turns out to be a branch, the branch to be a leaf, and the leaf turns out to belong to another tree that will show up tomorrow. As for ourselves, failure to remember our various selves and their claims can also be costly. Each day we tell our simple truth, throwing our judgment into the ether like a baseball while forgetting that yesterday we threw out quite another simple truth, and yet another the day before. Unknown to us, all our contradictory simple truths have gone into orbit, only to return and hit us one day like baseballs.

Convenient forgetting is the opiate of the perfectionist, but also the source of his ineffectuality—for even if he wants to take charge of his poor-relations selves, he speaks of them only to forget them; and his judgment becomes their servant. For an example, an acquaintance of mine years ago was often superb over cocktails on his favorite subject—that of helping people to better living through his daily work in real-estate sales. An unknown self usually sipped from the same glass, and it desperately wanted power and money. Since he had neither, this self often fed its needs by driving him home at eighty miles an hour. And while this self was feeding, one night, a pedestrian was killed by his speeding car.

Not long afterward, when I talked with the salesman, he seemed like a changed man. Shock had caused him, for the first time, to introduce his other self and to talk candidly about its hungers and its lifelong power over him. He knew now that he must no longer have anything to do with the competitive business world. Instead he was going to do an extraordinary thing: he was going to live at home and raise simple earthworms in his own back yard. And I thought, “Earthworms? That’s rather odd.”

He nodded vigorously. “Why not?” he said. “I have no wish any more to compete for money and power, so I’m

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going to raise one of the humblest things on earth, the simple earthworm. It will keep me here in the yard, close to simple living. And you know something? They multiply! Within six months, there will be two million earthworms, and on the market this will bring...." And at once he began writing down figures that swarmed like earthworms over the paper; and what self do you think it was that was guiding his hand?

By no means, however, must it be imagined that only destructive selves lead to collision. Our failure to listen to the various voices we have before judging may cause us to neglect certain important selves that need to breathe in us. Nowhere are collisions more pervasive, for instance, than in consequence of the judgments we make as to how we are going to spend our lives. Our choices may have given breathing room to a "better self," but other, forgotten selves, cut off by our choices from breath, will return in a hundred forms with their cry for air.

One woman who had "what every woman wants"—a handsome, successful husband, healthy teen-age children, home, style and a good waistline—was profoundly dissatisfied with her life, and some of her friends were profoundly dissatisfied with her. True, she was thinking of exchanging "what every woman wants" for some things she wanted, but her friends wondered how she could be so selfish as to want more than she had. Meanwhile, she was in continual exhaustion from the collisions of selves wanted and unwanted that were clamoring for a place in her life.

Moreover, for years she had had no breathing room for certain selves that needed to breathe in her. One was a literary self that breathed among good books, good talk, and a chance to sharpen her ideas. Another was a social self that breathed when she met the challenges of working with civic

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groups. At home, however, her ideas were squelched and her social projects undermined. Whenever she spoke of going out, her husband would mutter, "I'd hoped we would watch TV together," and then, when she stayed, he promptly went to sleep in front of his wide, turbulent screen. Though he never said so, he led his little woman to understand, in a variety of loving ways, that her mind was really a foolish, clattering bundle of bones that "should" be kept in the closet. So she put these bones in the closet, along with the skeleton of her social self, and in time it all came marching forth in the form of a ghoulishly unpredictable chilly self that found fault wherever it walked.

One evening, after an especially quiet dinner with her husband, she asked him three questions with studied casualness: "What would you really like me to be like?" (His answer was extensive, with many gestures.) "Was I ever like that?" (Yes, she was, he decided, before they were married.) And finally; "Do you know why I was like that?" (Here he was stumped.) Then she introduced the selves that had been breathing in her when she seemed most lovable—all the ranging, exploring selves, full of questions about life and brimming with vigorous interest in books, talk, the theater, and friends, who liked to hear what she had to say. She could work harder then, with more energy, because all of her was there to breathe.

In that strange evening with all her selves before him, the choice posed for him was no more than implied. And yet, because he loved what he knew in her, and because her love helped him now to see more in her, a new relationship was on the threshold. He was beginning to see that the best way to keep his wife lovable was to accept the whole person.

Behind this story, however, there is a little shadow of wonder, and a question. One wonders about the people today

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who fill psychiatrist's offices with resentment against their mates, and who cry, "The person I married won't let me breathe!" Of course we love best the place where we can breathe; but, on the other hand, can we ask others to grant us breathing room when we have not provided breathing room for ourselves?

Our basic collisions are not with others, but with ourselves. It is no sign of health to crowd our poor-relations selves into closets because they didn't "fit in" with our plans. Insofar as we neglect the selves we have in making our arrangements and arriving at our judgments, we invite the collisions that sap our strength. We collide with ourselves because we haven't looked within to see more realistically the situation on our own psychic freeway. A more realistic way is to look within long enough to see that we do have selves that need room and that sooner or later will get on a collision-course unless we arrange our lives to make room for them.

11.

Finding Friends in Babel's Tower

ANY GLANCE THROUGH THE CORRIDORS OF HISTORY suggests that friendship has generally been hard to find. All the voices in the corridor, from those seemingly chilly ones of the Greeks, like that of Menander who said: "Happy is the man who has but the shadow of a friend," down to the warm voices of politics and advertising today, with their easy usages of "my friend" and "dear friend,"—all of these voices may at times appear to us to sound hollow. For there are other, closer voices: that of Emerson, when he described friendship as the "slowest flower in the garden of God," and that of a neighbor who said, "There was only one person who ever understood me."

In our own lives, furthermore, we may have had our share of odd linkages called friendship. We have had "fair-weather" friends, who want to be around only when things are going well. We have even experienced the arrival of those vultuously-friendly persons who might be described as "foul-weather" friends, who manage to show up only

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when things are going poorly. But, taken all in all, we have to admit that "all-weather" friends are hardest of all to find. For they are those exceptional persons who "know" us and still like us.

Even if we found friends, would we have time for them? Once more, now that we are thinking about friendship, it may soon be discovered that we modern people have reversed an ancient process. While the ancient Greeks appear to have been concerned with surrounding themselves with the kind of living arrangements that would foster friendship, modern people tend more to lavish attention on those skills that produce machinery and greater creature comforts. The hurrying perfectionists, in particular, with their idealizations and still-pictures on little cards derived from their childhood that tell them what is what, are unlikely to refrain long enough from hurrying through life to enjoy friends if ever they found them. Moreover, their very insistence that they already have friends, or are about to have, creates a condition which will prevent in advance their finding such friends as they might have.

Some perfectionists insist that all their friends are "charming"—possibly because for their friends to be anything less than charming would serve to cast doubt upon their own ability as judges of character. Accordingly, they never really see the people in their lives. Other perfectionists withdraw from the whole idea that friendship is possible: for having become disappointed idealists and worm-eaters in the erstwhile enchanting garden of friendliness, they now ascribe to friendly gestures the lowest and murkiest motives. They may choose to see themselves as solitary geniuses too fine to be understood; or, if they have a philosophical turn of mind, they may become especially drawn to those pages in human history which appear to demonstrate that friendship has always

been an evasion, a delusion, or a snare, and furthermore that man is essentially alone, and that his normal solitude is only occasionally broken by interludes of apparent friendship.

All these different voices laying down laws as to what friendship is about suggest that we are living today in a modern equivalent of Babel's Tower. The old tower, it would seem, was not so diabolical as ours is; and we may have refined the tortures that were once arranged for man in Babel. Something went wrong with our first skyscraper, it is true. From motives not dissimilar to those of an unknown Frenchman who placed a bomb in the second *étage* biffy of the Eiffel Tower during the de Gaulle referendum, the Old Testament God placed a time bomb in Babel's tower. His idea was to create confusion by way of punishing the citizens for their arrogance. There was nothing really diabolical about this action, however, for the people could at least quickly discover that they spoke with different tongues. Once they knew that ordinary means of understanding one another were unusable, they could devise new ways of communication.

But let us suppose that Jehovah had wanted to be truly cruel and diabolical. Suppose he had allowed these early skyscraper builders to go on *imagining* they understood one another, and then, by subtle twisting of consciousness, changed the meanings of words in their heads, so that each Babeler had a different set of mental pictures to go with the words they all had in common. And finally, suppose that in fiendish glee from the prospect of real confusion that would ensue, Jehovah had also provided these people with a goal of Perfect Understanding and led them to imagine that they could reach this understanding so completely as to be "two souls with but a single thought." As you can see, the result would have been truly diabolical, and they would then have

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had what we have today: a Tower of Babel with telephones and no phonebooks—with everybody on the phone believing he has the right number but almost nobody talking to the person he thinks he is talking to.

Even though Jehovah did not accomplish such a design for confusion we have done this for ourselves and therefore have our chief source of misery in relationships such as those of "friendship." No wonder that modern people, all of them susceptible now and then to those private visitations of sentimental longing to "come home again," all of them capable of being unexpectedly touched by "auld lang syne," seem truly unable to come home to the experience of friendship: it's all because we have outdone Jehovah by placing on the second story of our own modern tower the more ingenious time bomb—perfectionism.

It is no sign of health to be afraid of friendship while singing our commercial to the effect that we have all the friends we can "use." On the contrary, one index to our growth in ability to live among people is a genuine concern to find out what prevents friendship, what we can expect from friendship, and how we can enjoy friendship in our own lives.

The basic characteristic of friends is that they exchange joy in each other's company, not from a consideration of what sort of persons they are going to be tomorrow, but rather from recognition of what they are now. There is nothing so dismal as having people reserve their liking for you until you have rid yourself of your faults. The feeling of being liked while you are amending your defects is one of the most cherishable in the world.

Because of the perfectionists' need to dodge about in order to protect their pictures of the "ought" and the "should," we have all around us today several monstrosities of human linkage brought forth in the name of friendship. Among the

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strange motives that join people together as friends, for instance, is the wish to suffer together, which often produces linkages of misery. And the wish to hate together is sometimes known to unite persons who dine together in order to feed their mutual resentments.

Most widespread of all these perfection-riddled relationships are those of Deadly Friends and Close Enemies.

Deadly Friends are those who are prepared to like you on condition that you first drop dead as you are, and become reborn as they are. They do not know who you are but, nevertheless, they know what you are not, and concerning your flaws they are authorities. Since their friendly occupation happens to be the renovating business, they are going to make you over. Now and then, it must be pointed out, Deadly Friends do succeed in making someone over. I knew a woman once who for six years had been working and slaving over a hot motivation to make her husband over: she succeeded at last, was horrified by the result, and the "friendship" in their marriage came to an end. More often, however, something very fine and deep in our nature outwits the efforts of these uninvited spring-cleaners of our psychic wardrobe. We go on as we are, they go on trying, and this is why Deadly Friends are so often lasting.

The French, in denoting their own resistance to Deadly Friends, have the expression *la pudeur*. It describes the deep reticence they have: they take a long time before giving you their number. And there is much to be said for this. If the French could observe the formidable use to which our own American telephones are put, they would quickly redouble *la pudeur*. What the French actually do with their telephones, I cannot tell, for I can't operate them. But an American telephone, which I know better, is an electronic device

for justifying at a distance our minor surgery on other people for their own good.

Since we do not especially like Deadly Friends, it is rarely that they are recipients of our favors. Nevertheless, favors are now and then bestowed. If the Athenian leader Pericles was correct when, in his funeral oration at the state cemetery at Ceremeicus, he observed that "we make our friends by conferring, not by receiving favors," then there is one man recently in our midst who might well receive the undying gratitude of Deadly Friends everywhere. In a remarkable gesture, Edgar Lee Masters permitted a number of Deadly Friends, after they were dead, to have their final words. The results he set down in that proper bible for Deadly Friends known as *The Spoon River Anthology*. In a furiously macabre, posthumously crackling version of what goes on among the living, these people hurled their labels of infamy from under their gravestones and, for all we know, are still thrusting around down there getting in the last word.

A woman of my acquaintance years ago had many friends whom she hated. With one in particular she could not forego engaging in daily battles of barbed pleasantries. They met to judge each other over teaspoons and, as their friendship deepened, they grew gayer with increased knowledge of each other's frailties. A strange gaiety it was, to be sure, and one which concealed a growing loneliness. As was beginning to be evident, they had judged each other too often. Their meetings grew strained. Under their banter they were saddened when they met, like vacationing cripples who least of all want to encounter other cripples from neighboring beds in the same ward. Finally, when it was no longer possible even for their mutual disrelish for other people to bind them

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together, they retained the conviction of deepest friendship and saw one another no more.

Sometimes, by falling unwittingly into this Deadly-Friend habit we may succeed so well in labeling another person's defects that we eventually label a worthwhile relationship out of existence. Small wonder that most of us grow excited by the appearance in our lives of a new friend. For such a friend has no way of knowing our frailties as yet; nor has he any inkling of our past deficiencies that he can dangle before us when we try to exhibit our little dance of merit in the present. We can perform the celebration of ourselves with gusto because in the eyes of our new friend we have not become familiarly dull with defects.

Surely it is valid to ask ourselves, now and then, if some of our old friends might not prefer to have new friends at their door. They may have noticed us behaving strangely. Our behavior may suggest that we think of them only as comprising the sum total of the defects we have noted. They may even have been deflated by an habitual look of disrelish in our eyes when we smile. This look and what it tells them is sufficient in itself to arrest the infectious playfulness to which most persons are naturally heir and which we might as well be enjoying in our friends.

A second order of perfection-riddled relationships is that of Close Enemies: these are persons so firmly locked in combat that their resulting reasons for mutual disdain have obscured their real need for each other. You will notice that, however distasteful to each other they may be, they are always anxious to join the quarrel. Yet they seem to have so much more in common than they do with anybody else, that one wonders why they are enemies are all.

In his gloomy, cell-like office at one of our larger universities sat one of the most perceptive analysts of poetry I ever knew.

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Seldom, however, did his classes come to know about his gifts, for the most perfervid uses of his energies were usually deployed in combat with a close enemy more than two thousand miles away, who sat in another gloomy, cell-like office. They were both critics of poetry, and their disagreements had brought them both to such wrath that they were writing D-Day books against each other. They fed on each other's literary flesh like philological hyenas. Some persons might have said that their public clawing amounted to nothing more than a literary stunt in order for them to gain publicity. Others might have pointed out that combat feeds creative energy and that if the angry pair were not embattled they would not be writing at all. Still others, generalizing from similar struggles of cell-dwellers in modern Babel, might have urged that combat is inescapable and proper between persons whose views are inherently opposed.

But I knew one of these venom-centered contenders and knew something about the other. Far from their being radically opposed, they sounded like twins and didn't know it. Like thousands of other grudge-holders who squander energies on reprisals, they were probably all the more angry because of their unacknowledged need for one another as good companions.

Sometimes the ordinary reason for people's failure to enjoy as friends the persons they most need is not hard to find: For all their words their own perfectionist habits of thought prevent them from attaining a genuine contact with one another. Most of us have noticed days when everyone we know is unresponsive to us. What we intended as a caress was received as a blow. Our humor struck others as cutting sarcasm, our reserve became snobbishness, our smile was a leer, and everywhere we went it was as though we had reached out a hand to help a friend in the dark and suc-

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ceeded in poking him in the eye. We wonder how people could understand our motives so poorly.

Unfortunately, they may understand something within us too well. While we were talking we may have had a second sound track going. This is the track which conveys our "pre-symbolic" language of empathy, or its opposite, the language of rejection. Although we may be unaware that they exist in us, these languages do not escape those who listen to us. When we have an empathic sound track running we give a person the feeling that we are "going along" with him as though helping him in the direction he wants to go. When our rejection sound track is running, however, we give a person the feeling either that we are going away from him or that we are preventing him from going where he wants to go. These languages may for the most part seem independent of our control. Seldom, for instance, may we consciously intend rejection, but there it is grinding out its own communication on a loud second sound track.

Other pre-symbolic languages that may be audible on our second sound track would be: the language of love, the language of hostility, the language of unsureness, the language of despair, the language of indifference. All the time, while we have been too busy getting things said to notice this powerful world of the unverbalized, these languages may have been undoing what we have been trying to do with our words.

There are two orders of perfectionists who are particularly oblivious to the existence, value, and importance of second sound tracks. One group consists of what might be called "literal-minded" people: they always know how many petals the flowers have. When shown a painting they fall to close perusal to guess how many brush strokes went into its execution, and whenever they are shown through my sailing ship

they chiefly want to know how much it cost me. Since the literal-minded person has many of these practical problems to occupy his mind he is usually horrified by what we call small talk. A lot of talk, as I said earlier, ordinarily exists for the purpose of preventing silence, which is particularly horrible in our time due to the continual surrounding of our lives by carefully prepared and paid-for noise. What the literal-minded person neglects to see, however, is that small talk has a dual function in human life. He can accept his own literal explanation that some "stupid" people indulge in small talk to dispel silence; but what he misses altogether is the fact that small talk has another value and meaning as a carrier of the second sound track. We say, "How are you?" We don't care how the person is but meanwhile on our second sound track we may be indicating that we are: glad to see you, sorry to see you, impatient to leave you, afraid you will go away, (or even) bored that you exist. Seldom does the literal-minded person bother with any of this. One day the wife whose need for affection is unrequited looks over her husband's newspaper to find him, and says, "Darling, you never tell me you love me, do you?" From behind the newspaper presently come two voices. One carries the literal answer, "Of course I love you or I wouldn't be here would I?" and the other comes grinding out from a second sound track saying, "It would be better, dear, if you went on the stage—the one that is leaving in half an hour."

A second order of perfectionists who are seldom aware of their own second sound track is composed, I am sorry to say, of what we call "educated" people. One trouble with an educated person is his Olympian nostrils. He fails to appreciate, he is deaf to and contemptuous of small talk. This means he probably knows nothing about pre-symbolic languages; but in his case, it is no matter. For he has usually

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frightened people so much already by his verbal recourse to specialist terms as well as by his quick way of seeking out someone who is conversant with his field and then hiding with him, that his own second sound track arrives only to kill the slain.

There is a practical way to avoid frightening people with our own disorderly sound track, and that is simply to think about them now and then in their own setting. Thinking about a friend thus, in terms of his own background, dreams, problems, and equipment to handle them, is an excellent thing; the worst thing you can do to a friend is never to think about him in this way. Then when you are going to visit a friend, instead of knocking on the door try standing outside the door for a moment and asking yourself why you have come this far to see him. What do you really like about this person? If you have found something truly to admire, go on into the house and your second sound track will remain pleasantly in tune with the nice things your words say. On the other hand, if after standing outside there for a while you are unable to think of anything to like about your friend, you had better go home.

When Deadly Friends and Close Enemies have made an honest effort to understand the communication process and its pitfalls in human life they have often become friends. But here's the rub: only amiable imperfectionists hold the capacity and the honest desire to break their own conscious and unconscious deadlocks. As for the perfectionists they cannot be friends, since they can neither examine their own second sound tracks nor free themselves from the underlying compulsion to prove one another wrong. And usually it has been this need to prove wrong, piling up reasons for mutual distaste on top of original misunderstandings, that kept them from being friends in the first place.

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Were it not for this perfectionist reluctance to resolve conflicts, many persons in the grip of misunderstandings could easily apply to them one of the finest techniques known for breaking deadlocks: simply replace the need to prove wrong by the need to find common grounds. There is nothing unrealistic, for instance, about turning our ingenuity to the task of finding honest grounds for liking one another. Communication, in a way, is the activity of seeking agreements, and while it is sad enough that we must sometimes fail to reach agreements, it becomes infinitely sadder if we remain blind to the agreements that are before our eyes. Years ago psychologist Alfred Adler used to employ with his patients a basic therapy *not* built around the study of "what is wrong" with the sufferer: instead, he would ask of his patients, "How much is there in you that is still healthy?" and then, with the patient's help, seek to find out. Often this therapy can be applied with gratifying result to deadlocks of Close Enemies if they want to break their deadlock. Whenever the governing wish of two persons is to find what is still healthy and worthwhile between them, they enter upon the possibility of being friends.

Such a waxworks of the unloving as we have briefly outlined renders the thought of finding better friends a provocative one. Since for the price of having friends we do not want to drop dead and be reborn in their likeness nor to find ourselves gloomily embattled over imaginary differences, it is small wonder that our first wish as imperfectionists may be to revise our circle of friends to include some people we like. That is to say, friends who will let us breathe in their presence even as we let them breathe in ours.

Our best friends will be those who enjoy assisting us to belong to ourselves, but we must repay the favor. Until we learn something about yielding that rigid perfectionism that

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makes us insist upon transforming everybody into second-class versions of ourselves we cannot release people into their own custody at all, much less do it with joy.

Unfortunately, this art of assisting others to belong to themselves—an art perhaps better understood by our ancestors—is not easy to learn today. For instance, we have an expression floating up from the scented area of charm schools: “Be interesting!” which is a grubby perversion of an important principle: that of attracting friends and then helping them to relax and be themselves by letting them know what we are really like. As it happens this has nothing to do with autobiographical filibustering. Furthermore, unwisely used, it can be hazardous. There are many excellent reasons for not divulging ourselves to persons unable to receive them properly. A professor of psychology who I knew as an extremely likeable fellow once took his psychology too seriously. He told his classes rather too much about his faults, his unsureness as a teacher, and his imperfect knowledge of his subject.

In a surprisingly short time, his students began in a variety of ways to exhibit their contempt for him. At first they shuffled and talked during class and roundly questioned his authority. Then they snickered openly at his efforts at appeasement. One extremely sharp student, who had been riding him unmercifully by pulling out authoritative examples that controverted the professor, ended by blurting: “Why didn’t you straighten out Jung’s mandala symbols before you came to class?” At once the whole class came to a hushed silence of anticipation. In this moment hung the question, for all future time, of the existence of order in that room. Had the professor told the student to leave the class for insubordination, things might have improved; even then the class might not have returned to order, for the professor

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had divulged too much to persons unable to understand his imperfectionist motive.

While caution is sometimes necessary in divulging ourselves if we are imperfectionists there are many occasions when we would truly like to be known. When we want to let ourselves be part of an open and creative exchange there are two ways of doing so that can help us find friends in Babel's Tower.

One of them is: *make sure the person you present is really yourself*. If you think this is easy, pause a moment and consider. For one thing, as we saw previously we may not have a self but selves that we might present. For another, we may not like the selves we have and not wish to communicate them. Montaigne spoke feelingly when he said, "The worst is to despise our being," for he knew that when we despise ourselves it shows. Other people can be brought to yawn with boredom or outright annoyance from too close contact with something that despises itself. If we do not care much for the selves we want to be liked for, what we may present instead of ourselves is a cluster of misrepresentations of what we would like to be.

Only when we have taken charge of ourselves can we present a unified, controlling self to other people. What makes the presenting of the self so difficult is that we are called upon first to do something that has long been out of fashion in our society: we are required to get acquainted peacefully with the selves we have and then bring them under some central authority. This means taking charge of ourselves, and only when we have done this do we have a worthwhile governing self to present. If this seems too much to ask, remember that in olden times one answer to the problem of self-governing was to get acquainted with ourselves in solitude. The idea behind embracing solitude was

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not that of wanting to be alone because we despised friendship: we embraced solitude in order to make a friend of ourselves. "We must be our own before we can be another's," said Emerson. One's own self is the first and final friend; and that friend must be cultivated. Ancient Egyptians, who used to say good-bye to one another on the street with "make for thyself joy," were in effect saying the same thing: that ability to gather ourselves into some sort of enjoyed unity was a prerequisite for bringing joy to others.

Although solitude in our time has been somewhat discredited as an entirely suspicious and sick avoidance of duty to stay close to the pack and do as they do, nevertheless many of us today are discovering its crucial importance in our lives. One of the greatest ways of making a friend of ourselves is to get away from our century now and then and discover ourselves in the past. We look into the nineteen centuries of our Western heritage and lo! they turn out to be nineteen rooms we have passed through, stumbling in most of them but wonderfully released in others to take charge of the unique persons we are. It is no secret to modern psychology that when we notice others with similar problems who have not done too badly we will have more courage to be ourselves, and share ourselves.

Another way to find friends in Babel's Tower is: *create an atmosphere in which you can be known.* Since Freud, many of us have misconstrued the role of sharing to mean either one of two things: singing our own commercial, or spilling our own misery. We have thus corrupted the art of self-disclosure. But this art was once highly developed. Looking in upon ancient Athens once more we notice that a great function of the agora, or market place, was the exchange of ideas. Socrates, who said we like to think of friends as the "greatest of blessings" and then consider neither how to

procure them nor how they may be retained, believed this market place had something to do with the art of friendship. He had a peculiar kind of phonebook for looking up people to see where they lived, and he taught the Athenians how to use it. What was the teaching? That we let ourselves be known in the course of an exchange of general ideas. In other words, don't *tell* people your success story to show them what you are like: let him find out what you are like as we all talk together about the ideological cabbages and kings of the day. This was, perhaps, the ancient meaning of cultural pastimes. Don't imagine that the Greeks, while they were being oil-rubbed and scraped with strygils at the baths, talked philosophy for the sake of being cultural; they gracefully left that to the people of our era who know what Culture is. Instead, the Greeks conversed about general ideas because they enjoyed it, and in order to lead themselves to people they wanted to find, as well as to enable other people to find them. They said that other races loved money but as for themselves they loved wisdom—and part of the wisdom was in learning how to choose the people in their lives.

In this light how ridiculous our rusted modern voices seem, our perfect golden silence, our basking before the laundromat of the mind, our pathetic hope that friends will come!

The Greeks earned them. They did so by creating an atmosphere of exchange in which they themselves could be known.

No one can be certain of having the friends he wants when he wants them in this world. Most people, however, might have better friends more of the time if they were to take up again this ancient pastime of exchanging ideas as accomplices in the venture of life. When people in such

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open discussions describe other people they describe themselves—and their future relation with you. Their fund of hatred toward other people in other places describes their reaction to you if something goes wrong; their gentleness toward fools elsewhere describes their future treatment of you when you do a foolish thing. It is not enough to know this principle: what is important, perhaps, is that we resolutely make room in our lives for some ancient pastimes of self-discovery and self-sharing that might help us to find our way to one another today.

If one thing seems to be clear it is that neither Providence will give us our friends nor electronic devices our sense of companionship with them. Our own voices must be found, and they must be heard with others in an atmosphere conducive to their expression in our own homes. Then perhaps we can truthfully say, as time goes on, that we chose our friends rather than having them chosen for us by the accident of neighboring desks or houses.

12.

Perfection's Nightmare— the Dream of Togetherness

AMONG ALL THE WORDS LOCKED IN TINY BOXES of our own making, perhaps none gives such trouble as the word "love." It is to be found in homemade boxes of many sizes. No matter how you open them, they explode, like the one Pandora had, and fill the air with emotional meanings as different from one another as the boxes in which they are contained. Voices may fly out to cry, "Love is Truth," "Love is perfect sharing," "Love lasts forever"; but other voices will reply: "Oh I wish these things were true!"

Who has not, in the earliest time of being in love, dreamed of tomorrow's "togetherness"? Of somehow blending with the loved one in everything we do? Then in the earliest moments of recognition of one of the most powerful forces in life, we associate our new found "togetherness" with spring-time, the month of April, the flowering of our own desire and of a mutual impulse to give ourselves away so that we shall truly have togetherness. Nevertheless it is not long before certain shocks take place and we begin to wonder what

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we are going to do now that we are together. Our eyes wandering restlessly, we seem drawn to observe ironic and anachronistic things, like the lines of T. S. Eliot where he says, "April is the cruellest month."

Why would April, why would love, why would the dream hold within itself an element of cruelty for human life? Why do some people reach the stage where they can say: "I would not like to love again"?

Disillusionment is love's greatest hazard. Only if knowledge then helps us to understand one another better will our love-nature heal its wounds. Otherwise we may, indeed, not love again. If it be true that communicating means "assisting to understand," then nowhere in life is this assistance needed more than in questions of love.

That code of love to which we in America are committed calls for us to abjure the many capricious and speculative love affairs of a George Sand for the sake of one long-range marriage that will be our final venture. But at the same time we are expected to establish this final relationship at an earlier age than ever before in recent history and without seriously leaving our dedicated places at the drive-in movie or before the shrine of the television. Consequently, the rapidity with which modern teenagers leap into matrimony is today a growing concern to parents, and often to the teenagers themselves. For their experience may be like that of leaping into a swimming pool in which there is no water, so sudden and abrasive is the discovery of what they have done. One early word for love was *amor*, meaning "to hook," and it is not long, sometimes, before newlyweds begin to wonder what it is that they have hooked.

For the swiftness of the leap into matrimony teenagers are not entirely to blame. Ours are the years of the unprofessional motivators of conduct, as well as of those who are profes-

sional. Researchers among the latter group, working on the study of "impulse buying" to increase the number of purchases by housewives in supermarkets, turned their attention to the blinking of the human eye. It was found that if the market was brilliantly lighted the normal rate of eye-blanks was cut down more than half, in consequence of which the now dazed, narcotized women went around more slowly with their little carts buying more than they ordinarily would. Success in motivating people in the direction of impulse-buying is not, however, entirely in the hands of the professionals. Unlike the teenager of a few decades ago, every child of seventeen can today see clear evidence from the real-estate tracts near his own neighborhood that if only he will quit school, take a job, and marry, he will have achieved, in one signature and few words, the grand leap from mowing the neighbors' lawns to living abundantly in a time-plan world with a house of his own, payment for which requires almost nothing down except himself.

To this inducement other emotional pressures are added. This evening, for example, in countless high school "sororities" across the land, a number of girls will sit around tables in a streamlined version of the candlelight ceremony by which an engagement is announced. While the successful girl passes the chocolates, thirty palpitating hearts will rue the waste of this hour, the general decline of their years, the sag of status, and will thus be readied to launch on an accelerated program of "impulse-buying" their way into matrimony.

Nearby in the local college, meanwhile, exists the girl of eighteen whose phone is always ringing and to whom it could be said that no professorial wild horses will drag her into serious inquiry as to the nature of the subjects. Her charm is already unquestionable without cultivation, and to make

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sure that this will be so, she has surrounded herself with boys who think her charming. The so-called "life of the mind" holds little interest for her except as a kind of culture-coating she can brush on at her table if she should happen to commit the sin of involvement with the egghead fringe. Her task is to wait and see how things go, for she has no wish to suffer the fate of that southern coed who, when asked by her counselors why she had come to college, replied: "I came here to be went with, but I ain't." If she is to avoid such a plight she must not become a "grind" or a dedicated, talkative devotee of some particular study. Suppose she met a boy who was prepared to take her hand on condition that he did not have to take her mind also? She had better wait, dangling in expectancy of that Prince Charming who will ride in on a white horse, soon to become an ass. When that great experience happens, and on the basis of the charm of the orientation of his hair, on the smoothness with which he mixes martinis, they become "two souls as one" who promise to love. Is it surprising that, after the first jolt of love is over, they may wake up to discover that they are two strangers, dedicated to love?

That an increasing number of young people, today, do wake up to this discovery can be attested to by the fact that one of every three marriages in this decade ends in divorce. One by one, these couples find that they are not together: emerging differences in background, in motivation, and pace, as well as the radical differences in mental pictures each sex has of the other, and which neither can explain to the other, has produced such an impassable gulf of dislike between them that they may wonder how other couples can relate to each other at all.

Why then does it still seem to happen, despite all the ob-

stacles, that some couples do relate to each other in mutual enjoyment that grows through the years? Their differences seem minor, their quarrels few and swiftly made up, and still their joy in each other seems to grow. Have they a secret that other couples have been too busy to find out?

Often their secret is simply this: *they have understood that they can never be together*; and this knowledge has led them to an absorbing interest in touching across the gulf. This absorption has taught them to love.

If April is the cruellest month, it may be because modern people have unwittingly retained, below the threshold of consciousness and where it does the most harm, the romantic goal of Togetherness. From the earliest teen-age days of "going steady," young couples are led to understand that a healthy relationship means *doing* everything together, and *being* everything together, and that this togetherness can lead to "perfection" in marriage. For example, in *Out of my Heart*, a recent bestseller by Agnes Sligh Turnbull, the authoress observes that she often failed "to rise to that peak of perfection in love which I should have—and *could* have reached." [Italics mine] She says further that the "striving for the perfection of love is the leaven which lifts a marriage from mediocrity to a glowing affinity of the spirit," and finally sums up by pointing out that, "Perfection in marriage can be achieved only by preserving a balance." So entralling, in fact, has the idea of "glowing affinity of spirit" become that it is now possible, at least in California, for togetherness to be carried beyond the grave. Driving up Vine Street in Hollywood, you can see for yourself, at the corner of Franklin, a thirty-foot billboard advertisement of one of the larger cemeteries, on which one word is placed: "Foreverness."

"Ridiculous!" you might say. Who but a few emotionally

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sundered women believe these days in "two souls with but a single thought" or that we can reach perfect bliss now or hereafter with anyone—even with ourselves?

To these questions a little investigation reveals an unexpected answer. When we turn from our conscious sentiments to find out what our everyday behavior reveals concerning our assumptions in love and marriage, we are soon brought to realize one thing: in our perfectionism we have been *behaving* as though we believed in perfect togetherness. Below the threshold of our words and songs we yearn for perfection in marriage, confident that we are entitled to find it. When we are disillusioned, moreover, and close off our willingness to continue in love, it is because our expectation of perfect togetherness has been shattered.

One sign of the presence of this underlying belief in togetherness is that of *expecting the loved one to understand*. Who does not expect this? Surely if a woman gives her love to a man she can at least expect to be understood! Similarly, when a man is willing to surrender his privilege of romping the lanes and glades, he is usually at least convinced that the one girl he wants and is going to marry possesses the gift of understanding him. Whatever other reasons a man may have for thus rendering up his single blessedness one thing is certain—he thinks he feels comfortable with her, the woman he has chosen, and is likely to say, "She understands me."

Among the shocks of life however, is that produced when we find that we are not understood and, worse, were probably never understood. And it is precisely at this point that April's cruelty bids us find cause for blame. Mary, faced with her husband's obvious lack of understanding of her simplest emotional needs, found herself unable to escape one of two conclusions: (1) Her husband does not

love her after all, or he would understand her; or (2) He does understand her secretly, and doesn't care. Either one of these possibilities brought a chill sensation far removed from springtime's dream of togetherness: humiliation, from having been fooled, mingled with resentment at having been used shabbily in the name of love. She had been bilked out of the one thing she had a right to expect: that they would be together in understanding.

A second symptom of our belief in togetherness is *guilt when we discover that we don't understand the one we love.* Tom believed himself deeply in love with Mary, but from the time they were married he began to notice that nothing he could do for her seemed quite right. What distressed him most was the discovery, within himself, of an undreamt-of capacity to hurt her whom he loved and, moreover, greatly admired. Her way with the children, her management of the house, her alertness to his needs made her seem deserving of someone who could understand her better. With such thoughts he began to feel there must be something uniquely wrong with himself. One night she turned upon him, and with desperate candor arising from the pangs of her own unrequited nature, she cried, "You have never understood me!" A silence existed in their deeper glances after that and a little death that stood between them even when, seemingly recovered, they laughed and played. For both of them had expected a togetherness in understanding, without which they believed their marriage could be no more than a shadowy contract.

Let me say here that I do not understand women. Long ago I conceded, at first ruefully and later with joy, that woman is an unfolding process, full of surprises, and that I shall never understand the totality of the process. I make

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the confession freely and peacefully, because it seems to me that such an acknowledgment does good service in opening the way for better acquaintance with the sex we call opposite. I remember my great relief upon discovering, by reading Flaubert and Proust, that no man can be expected to understand a woman, as indeed no woman can be expected to understand a man. An even greater relief came to me when I realized, on closer acquaintance with the Jungian and Adlerian theories in psychology, that no one of us questing creatures is going to understand another tomorrow.

Something Dr. Brand Blanshard of Yale once wrote about understanding now began to make sense to me. "We shall never wholly understand another living creature," said Dr. Blanshard, "if only because we can't exchange biographies." In other words, no matter how religiously we strive to *do* everything together, and to *be* together in everything, we remain essentially alone in our manner of doing and of being—and our dream of perfect blending is thus perhaps no more than another descended delusion from the lavender fancies of our romantic ancestors.

Does such knowledge—if it be knowledge—take the joy out of loving? On the contrary it puts joy back in. Not only are we released from the guilt that comes when we fail to understand perfectly the one we love: more importantly, we are invited to the challenge of becoming acquainted with the outer veils of a mystery, and here the joy of exchanging love begins. When two persons who love are no longer deluded into supposing they know each other, when their vaunted fifteen years under the same roof no longer elicit the thought that they accordingly ought to understand each other, and when these two persons can sit down together to get acquainted with the outer veils of an acknowledged mystery—then it is that they enjoy their first honest linkage of psyches.

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For strange though it sounds, they are together in acknowledging that they are not together.

Ability to enjoy lasting love often hinges upon our realizing, in good time, that the other person will forever remain a mystery. Until we acknowledge this, our claim to understand may be the very thing that hampers our closeness: we may feel we understand so well that we lose all interest in what we have understood. What hurts many marriages is not lack of mutual understanding, it would seem, but lack of mutual interest. Suppose, for the moment, we think of one aspect of love as our capacity for absorption in another person. When we are absorbed, with all our senses aroused, we wish to nourish that which provokes our absorption. But among those lovers who obtrude their perfectionist pictures in the way of acquaintance, and presume to understand and to have togetherness, such absorption as they might enjoy is quickly lost. Wherever we find what we call "lasting love," this seems to be the result of an unusual variety, intensity, and frequency of absorption the lovers are known to direct toward each other. They seldom weary of watching each other's evolving uniqueness. Others merely cohabit; these are gay co-examiners of the newness that lies under each face prepared for each new day. They may even rejoice that they are not together—for then how could they love?

Another source of marital unhappiness derives from the fact that our hunger for togetherness often masks a desire to get ourselves together. When Madame Tussaud was already world-famous for her Baker Street waxworks in London, there arrived one day a very strange visitor, with an even stranger request. The dignified, middle-aged gentleman who sat in the Baker Street office obviously seldom came forth into the daylight. He had a dry, lusterless pallor in a face so comfortably empty of expression as to suggest an

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habitual aloneness, even when in the presence of others. He was prepared, he said, to pay a sizeable sum of money if Madame Tussaud's would make him a life-sized woman in wax. He would supply the dimensions, suggest the kind of hair and indicate the extent and nature of the costumes. His wife was to be so constructed as to have flexible joints so that she could be arranged to sit with him in the evenings at table and before the fire afterward. As he explained, he had for a long time wanted a wife, but mature reflection had brought him to the conclusion that a wax wife would prove more companionable and consoling to him through the years.

That Madame Tussaud's did not oblige this odd client with the wax wife he wanted has always struck me as unfortunate, and indicative of a certain lack of historical perspective there at the waxworks. For in a sense this was quite a normal request. In this world it is by no means uncommon for people to want wax wives and wax husbands. Notwithstanding all their descriptive words about love, what they really want are wax companions made to order, that will perform certain functions, sit in certain places, and generally be of assistance in helping their owners feel better about themselves.

At least two groups of persons, for instance, who are always looking for wax companions to fill their needs are what might be called Self-Finders and Self-Losers.

Self-Finders are unhappy persons who cannot seem to get themselves together. When they are alone, they feel lost and empty; and when they fall in love, their hunger is to find themselves in another person. They are searchers for "the second half" when they have not found the first, and consequently their emotional expression in love is usually one of deep gratitude often overlaid with an idealization of the

beloved that can soon be hampering to the recipient of this unhealthy worship. The Self-Finder is likely to say to his beloved, "I was nothing until I met you," which was true. And when he says, "I love," this also is true: for he loves the way he feels in the presence of his beloved, whom he is applying as a useful catalyst in order to give himself birth. Such usages of another person are, of course, hardest on the beloved, who is thus forced into responsibility for keeping someone alive who came to love empty-handed.

In addition to these persons who are trying to find themselves one notices a second group of persons, the Self-Losers, who have had themselves too long. If the truth be known, they have never really cared much for the selves they want to be loved for. Accordingly, they are found to declare, when they are in love, that they want to start life all over again; whereupon they seek to lose themselves in worship of the beloved. This approach, too, unfortunately, soon creates unhappiness, for it is not long before they get their old selves back again and tend to blame the beloved.

You will notice that in both these games of love, the lovers are playing with pedestals: Self-Losers are trying to place their love object on a pedestal, not in order to see the beloved better, but rather to lose themselves in the act of worship; Self-Finders, on the other hand, are trying to place themselves on the pedestal in order to restore their own self-esteem. No matter which way the game is played, no matter who goes up on the pedestal, the words of love and the craving for togetherness are motivated by personal problems of putting the self together, and it is not surprising that in most instances sooner or later the beautiful picture of the beloved turns out to be a self-portrait, and what these persons really want is a wax companion.

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The one over-all characteristic of those who cannot love is poverty—the psychic emptiness of persons who have never been told that they have to give themselves birth before they can expect to love or be loved. A certain amount of self-love is important: the self must be loved into existence. All these persons we have been describing in this chapter were using the singing commercial of togetherness as a remedy for the suffering they had drawn upon themselves by their failure to love themselves properly. From the foregoing portrayals—those who suffer from the shattering of their dreams of perfect understanding, and those who make others suffer the role of wax companions—one might well conclude that there is seldom much “love” in our loving, and this would seem to be true. But why must this be true? In our short time on the planet can we not at least learn how to love one another?

Probably we could—if ever we learned to get our perfectionist pictures out of the way: if we could desist from seeking certain kinds of perfect fulfillment, and instead turn to the kinds of relative acquaintance and joy-sharing of which we are capable. What this writer calls love might be defined as: the cherishing of an identity not our own, in a spirit of unrestricting support. Thus far in human history we have seldom been able to disenthral ourselves from self-portraits long enough to see another person in his own setting and thus to recognize that person as an identity separate from ourselves. On the contrary, from the moment we say we “love” we usually seek to bind, constrict, devour, change, reform, or disindividualize the object of our love, without so much as a question directed to the other person for the purpose of learning whether or not these reformations are desired. Without buttressing by the twin delusions—we understand and are together—we dread to think what might happen; yet if

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we could rid ourselves once and for all of these hand-me-down excuses for owning people, perhaps a rather wonderful thing might happen: we might discover that we could love, after all, and be loved for the awkward, bungling creatures we are.

13.

Do Our Dream Worlds Keep Us from Love?

AND AMERICAN TRAGEDY IS INVOLVED IN OUR curious custom of surrounding ourselves prematurely with responsibilities ill-suited to the selves we are about to become. Our 800,000 divorces annually, to say nothing of the divorces in spirit of those who go on living together from weariness, propriety, or for the sake of children, suggest the enormous gulf that exists today between the dream of togetherness and the actual state of disillusioned aloneness.

Small wonder that the tender theme of love, which in our youth calls forth poignant feelings, rich hopes, and gayest personal expression, may give way to another theme not so tender: the theme of resentment against the "opposite" sex. Dr. Carl Jung suggests that couples start out back-to-back, leaning against each other as they struggle against "necessity," but that presently, when their wall-to-wall carpet is paid for and their children have got up off it, they finally turn around and look at each other only to discover that, as Jung puts it: "They speak a different language."

When their language difficulty is discovered, today's couples may quickly fall to blaming each other for speaking the "wrong" language. Whoever said that the grave of love is excavated with little digs might have added that these excavations have been going on for some time. Because of an ancient protest of the male against the female, and of the female against the male, this battle of the sexes has gone on with cudgel and tongue since the beginning of recorded history. Until recently, man had the book as his weapon; in the battle of the sexes he kept the score and the score was called history. When women began to attain a certain measure of economic equality, however, they fought back with potent volumes of their own, such as Jane Collier's *The Art of Ingeniously Tormenting* (1753) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Rights of Women*. This latter thrust against male vanity, presumption, and undue power called forth a swift parry from Horace Walpole who called her "a hyena in petticoats."

Since it seems habitual in human nature for us to describe with most conviction those things we least understand, and to make the firmest laws where we have most poorly inquired into needs, it is not surprising that the needs of women have customarily in history been legislated by men, who understand them the least, and that these laws have been created without bothering to ask any questions of the women for whom the laws were set down. "Women," said Montaigne in the sixteenth century, "are not by any means to blame when they reject the rules of life which have been introduced into the world, seeing that it is the men who made them without their consent."

It is remarkable how much women have managed to accomplish in spite of having to acclimatize themselves to the results of masculine pronouncements in a male world. If men

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had had the same burden could they have done the same things? If they had had women's legal history, only recently the vote, and were still badgered in college, office and home by such remarks as, "These things are perhaps too difficult for a mere man," "A man lawyer? He would be too emotional" and "Frailty, thy name is Man," it is questionable whether they would have gone so far with their intellectual and creative development in so short an historical time.

Only sporadically in history have women banded together sufficiently to fly their unaccustomed banners of conviction; and then their crusades have gone into the sea. A number of women of the twelfth-century courts in France went so far as to hold "Courts of Love" to consider the nature of their own wishes in the matter of love and marriage. Their wisdom was interesting, but their persuasiveness was unavailing. Their laws never got beyond the informality of the drawing room.

What did emerge in consequence of their efforts, however, was a candid embroilment of male and female points of view that has been set down for us in one of the most unusual books in all literature: the *Treatise on Love* by Andreas the Chaplain (Andreas Capellanus) written toward the close of the twelfth century. Here both male and female held equal time for the airing of their grievances. The man begins by saying: "The mutual love you seek in woman you cannot find!" And at once he is prepared to show what is wrong with women in general.

"Every woman," he continues, "is loudmouthed, since no one of them can keep her tongue from abuses, and if she loses a single egg she will keep up a clamor all day like a barking dog, and she will disturb the whole neighborhood over a trifle.

"When she is with other women, no one of them will give

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the others a chance to speak, but each always tries to be the one to say whatever is to be said and to keep on talking longer than the rest; and neither her tongue nor her spirit ever gets tired out by talking. We even see many women who are so anxious to talk that when they are alone they talk to themselves. . . . Furthermore, you cannot find a woman so lowly born that she will not tell you she has famous relatives and has descended from a family of great men. . . . Moreover, no woman knows how to keep a secret. The more she is told to keep it to herself the harder she tries to tell it to everybody. . . . Every woman in the world is likewise wanton, because no woman, no matter how famous or honored she is, will refuse her embraces to any man, even the most vile and abject, if she knows that he is good at the work of Venus. . . .”

One might have supposed that this tirade would have finished the matter. On the contrary, in this unique volume, the woman too has her say, and begins by crying: “Men are slaves to such passionate desire that they cannot be held in the bonds of love at all! After they have thought about some woman or even enjoyed her, when they see another woman they straightway desire her embraces and they forget about the services they have received from their first love and feel no gratitude whatsoever. Men lust after every woman they see; their love is like that of a shameless dog. They should rather, I believe, be compared to asses, for they are moved by that low nature which shows that men are on the level of the other animals, rather than by that true nature which sets us women apart from the animals.”

Who knows, in looking over these bristling patterns of hostility between male and female in another age, but that perhaps they both were right; but the important matter for our attention is that each sex was disgruntled by the failure of the other sex to live up to an order of things each thought

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was correct. And it is here that we have an important source of conflict between male and female, a conflict old as time and one which cannot easily be resolved.

To begin with, let us look at our dream worlds for a moment. It is no news that everyone—male and female—has a dream world, like a gallery of pictures on the walls of the unconscious. It is made up of pictures to most of which we respond with warmth. Every now and then, when occasion and mood are conducive, we simply slide down in our chairs and drift through our picture gallery, filling in pictures, adding one or two. We call this daydreaming, but it is a very special world for us.

Nevertheless, this special world which serves favorably to solace us in our leisure, becomes a basic source of our inability to find grounds for honest tenderness toward persons of the other sex. For we look at others in terms of our own dream world, and, unfortunately for human relations as they are, our dream worlds are different—so different that a woman can go through many decades under the same roof with her mate without coming anywhere near the threshold of his picture gallery. He may likewise have no inkling of hers. On the contrary, because of the perfectionist myth in our culture of complete understanding where only warmth exists, they may assume their dream worlds are the same.

One of the greatest services we can perform for another person is to bring some of our love to his dream world, to try to become acquainted with it without fear, hostility, or ridicule; but it is just this that most men and most women refuse to do for each other. Possibly because deep in our perfectionist souls we cannot brook the idea that anyone we love should have a stream of thoughts and desires that are foreign to us, we seldom have the wish—even when we speak of “togetherness”—to know what really goes on in the prob-

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ably unsatisfactory head of the person we have promised to love.

What does go on? While we cannot penetrate the veils very far, some surprises are in store for us nevertheless when we try. A husband, for instance, is often horrified to observe his wife's seemingly inordinate and foolish need for affection and attention: this is not in his dream world! He doesn't understand it. He does not come home before dinner, turn to his wife, and say: "But you haven't noticed my new tie!" Nor does he say: "I never have any place to go with my new suit, and you never take me dancing so that I can show it off." Nor does he then sit down wistfully and observe: "You don't need me any more—how long is it since you told me you love me?"

Because he does not say these things, and because he does not have the importunate needs that she seems to have, he begins seriously to wonder what is wrong with women, and especially with his wife.

"Why," he wonders, "does she constantly need reassuring? Why does she need to be told that I love her, when I've just finished buying her a new garbage disposal? Women!"

What he cannot understand is that love to her means more than evidence of faithfulness and support. On one occasion he is bewildered by her unaccountable withdrawal when he remarks: "My way of loving you is to be here, keep the house, pay the bills." There are, unknown to him, moments when she would prefer a cave, a candle and him beside her. And what is worse, she remembers a time when he wanted, with her, just such things.

Actually, if he could get into her dream world, he might be surprised to find that, over the years, she had been visualizing an entirely different kind of male-female relationship from that which she now has with him. In the gallery of her

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thoughts, she may have pictured herself not as the one who does the laundry, brings up the children, and exercises the garbage disposal, but rather as such a source of delight to her mate as would now and then give him cause to palpitate: and there he is with his newspaper, his feet and his Golden Silence—and he's not palpitating.

She begins to feel that the desires in her life have never been requited. Why have hundreds of thousands of women joined Robert Browning clubs and in his writings mulled deliciously over some of the most jagged, inverted, and incomprehensible passages in all literature as though they were rippling water? Because Browning was a tender, accessible sharer of life with Elizabeth; he was charmed by her, motivated by eagerness to obtain her reactions, and to imbibe, as he spoke, the essence of her woman's psyche.

One dream of millions of women is that they will someday, on this earth, know a man who in the long range will be charming as a companion—who will share her reactions, who will be alive to her whole psyche, not merely attentive on occasions of special hungers, but rather in the long range—because of something unique in her that once captured his fancy, and still does. Why is a Frenchman often regarded as effective with women? Supposedly, a Frenchman is a connoisseur of women. Actually, all he does, in the presence of a woman, is to be more aware than other men are of all the voices coming out of her. Only a Frenchman can understand every word a woman doesn't say. This is because he has imbibed with his baby's milk the earthy theory that if he wants to get the best out of a woman, he had better discover honest reasons to be charmed by her and then make certain that she knows the pleasure she brings to him. If in the earlier, more robust of our American decades the Frenchman seemed the answer to a woman's dream, this was be-

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cause he seldom neglected to be aware of her special dream world.

On the other hand, many a woman in our society is horrified by the nature of the masculine dream world. She cannot abide his roving eye. On the beaches of this world his eye, with a solemn look of personal underprivilege, lingers on the one girl in a bikini. One day the wife is cleaning her husband's office desk, and out come magazines crowded with more girls in beckoning bikinis just like the one on the beach. Why does he do this? Surely, she reasons, the very fact that they have shared so many years together and raised their children should turn him away at last from such furtive peerings and peekings.

Usually a wife cannot accept the fact that the average man's sexual drive may be different from hers. He seems contradictory when he looks at her with love, for he looks with only one eye: the other is on exactly any passing woman. In all likelihood this amorous eclecticism of his is something that she does not share. She has no such pictures, sees only the costumes in a floorshow, and finds nothing but boyish depravity in his recital of early amorous adventures or his fantasizing of new ones. She finds it difficult to understand him, for nothing of this appears in her dream world. When she goes out to dinner with him and is trying to talk animatedly about her day and about the preparations to come here, she looks up to find him looking down the decolleté of the girl three tables over. Small wonder that she begins to feel hostility: the roving eye cannot, she feels, be equated with the personal love for her of which under duress he speaks. If the girl next door came out into the garden in a bathing suit, she would yawn and go back to work. Not him! He would be out there with his binoculars. In short, she is weary of his phantasies and humiliated by his horizontal

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mind. He knows this well, and if ever she offered him a penny for his thoughts he wouldn't give them to her for a million dollars.

Actually, if she could look into his dream world, she too might be surprised. Her first clue would be in some lines of the poet T. S. Eliot, that run: "I have heard the mermaids singing each to each. I do not think that they will sing to me." Now what is this about? Does this mean that he would really like to be running with the mermaids? It probably does. It means that it is unthinkable for him not to turn his eyes with relish on every lovely female form that moves, so long as in this world he moves. So long as he breathes, he will look. A wife needs to remember that his looking is part of a lifelong drive that brought him to her in the first place; and this drive will continue, throughout his life and into the corridors of his dreams.

Underneath these dreams, and equally unknown to his wife, is a deeper dream of having, someday in this world, a woman who will love not only him but also give a little love to his dream: who would be able to listen to him, not be hurt by his roving eye, be capable of smiling warmly at what he reveals of himself, and be interested in sharing the psychic life of his whole person and not merely the acceptable fragment known as her husband. If you have read *Of Human Bondage* you may remember the girl Norah, who loved Philip Carey by listening to his dream world, with all its turbulent troubles. The curious, releasing power of her absorption in the unfolding life of Maugham's tortured hero is one of the most touching episodes in literature—to men.

How curiously Nature has contrived us all! Reading the foregoing portions of this chapter, you may have had greatly different reactions depending upon your sex: If a woman, you may have rejoiced at the "plain truth" contained in the

section concerning woman's needs for fulfillment and for the presence of something more than a dustpan in her life; if a man, you may have been amused by the description of man's plight with his pictures. But beneath the rejoicing, the amusement, and the very likely perturbation over listening to the dreams of our two sexes, there exists a fundamental gulf of dislike which has perhaps hampered men and women in their striving to relate to one another.

Fortunately many a wise woman learns, in time, to feed the dream world of man, just as a wise man learns to feed the dream world of woman. Neither one's world may be to the taste of the other, but so long as we remain tidily oblivious to the claims and hungers of one another because they are not to our taste, we shall continue to experience only fragments of a person in love. The challenge here is to reach emotional willingness to see and to accept differences in our partner in a face-to-face relationship. We must learn to forgive our "opposites" their dream worlds as we would have them forgive us ours.

In order to feel less harsh about another's dream world we need to review, now and then, the background and setting of the person who has the dreams. For example, women are told men need to be flattered, and yet it is seldom realized that what we call the "need for flattery" is perhaps a fundamental need to feel alive. Before Bill married Jane, she seemed excited by his adventures, his habits, his stories; and during this period he undoubtedly had other girls who listened, too. Now, in marriage, he has agreed to be deprived of other girl listeners. Unfortunately, however, his wife has ceased to listen: she has "heard them all." Perhaps, to her, the only new things about him are his emerging faults; and if it is true that she speaks of them often, it is only in order to weed them out before they multiply. Her intentions may be the best;

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however, it is not long before he feels in her presence like something dissected. The wedding ring becomes a tourniquet that cuts off his circulation.

Similarly, in order for the male to observe something of the nature of his wife's "opposite" dreams, it would be well for him to spend one day obediently following her about from pillow to toast, from hairdryer to the nosebleed of her smallest son; and then, bravely, go to her concerts and lectures with her, without wry faces or the look of sudden death where he sits. If he would examine the book of his heritage long enough, he would discover that American males, today, are almost the only ones in the world who with resolution turn their practical backs on cultural materials. Moreover, if he could bring himself to join with his wife in some of the discussions that are to her taste, he might rediscover, at not more than one remove from this, that she was rapidly becoming twice as delightful to him. In this heritage, as he read along, he would discover that man has seldom accorded attention to the frequently hungry and aspiring mind of woman. Ordinarily he has been prepared to take her hand on condition that he shall first have succeeded in cutting off her head. It is her wish to improve her mind that threatens his getting the best use of her domestic services. For all he knows she might improve herself right out his life. So, as the Chinese used to bind female feet, man has almost always as a precautionary measure bound the female mind.

Among all the books that deal with the sexual aspect of marriage, few are to be found that can help us reconceptualize today the nature of *cherishing*—of giving the loved person into his own keeping. "Set my love in order, O thou who lovest me," was the cry of Jacopone da Todi, long ago; and it would seem that most of us in our time need a little ancient wisdom in setting our own love in order—we need

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help in knowing that we can be vulnerable to one another without anger, annoyance, or that lofty contempt for the claims of the opposite which for so long has raged in Western culture under the title: Battle of the Sexes. For this battle, as ever, is really the battle of the dream worlds. Until we can accept "otherness" in the person we love and thus share our different dream worlds peacefully, the sharing we do will remain fragmentary and disheartening to the human spirit.

14.

The Challenge of Imperfect Love

ONE OF THESE DAYS, NOW, THE LITTLE SAILING ship *Panacea*, with a cargo of books and old lecture notes, will hurry toward a tiny golden cove on Catalina Island's west side. There, with supplies on hand to beguile attendance, I hope to convene a "great-circle discussion" of seagulls, terns, vociferous cormorants, a serious contingent of Socratic seals, and one curious duck, if he is still there.

Almost every summer these imperfect travelers have helped me plan the fall lectures. And they have helped me toward the inward elasticity to accept and enjoy my own imperfect voyage.

They help in their own ways. When the sun is rising, the seagulls exhibit themselves high above the masthead, their remarkable eyes fixed on the underwater fish my own imperfect human eyes cannot see. But the tern comes more quickly as a delicate dancer above his quarry. His wings eloquently convey his hesitancy, his gauging, his tremulous eagerness, his ecstasy, his incisiveness at the plunge. Soon

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comes the cormorant, close observer and satirist. His sudden outburst of squawking may at any moment resound in a macabre way through hills and caves, as though in raucous laughter at something foolish of mine he has read over my shoulder. The seals, with gentler eyes, appear and reappear at various points of the discussion; and they tell me more about the watery dance of life than Whitman can, and in a more reassuring way. As for the duck, I can only hope he will be there to help. I hope so, because he has only one leg, and because for two years now he has nevertheless made it out to the boat, there to bob, turn and demonstrate his skill in his own communicating way, as though to say "See what can be done with so little!"

When I think about our central problem of loving—that of learning how to love a plain human being, when what we have been led to desire is a fancy one with no flaws—there abruptly swims into memory my vulnerable little friend, the duck. Perhaps for me he symbolizes, in his tiny way, our own human plight. Whether we admit it or not, all our imperfect psychic life yearns to give and receive love, not in order that we may belong to another, but in order to be assisted by love to belong to ourselves. Our plight is that it takes a lot of living, and of ideological discarding, before we come round to noticing that we are all as flawed and vulnerable as the one-legged duck. Only then do we discover that love is the privilege of being vulnerable together, and its joy consists in the unending discoveries of "how much can be done" with the little that we are.

How incredibly sad that, absorbed in our little pictures of the perfect and of the ought-to-be, we wander for so long past one another without raising our own eyes. Even supposing we could scatter on the floor before us the perfectionist pictures described in the last chapters, would we not still find

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that in consequence of our derived attitudes an unwholesome atmosphere exists between male and female in our culture to hamper the exchange of love? Along with the barrier of togetherness and the barrier of our different dream worlds, there remains in our culture a third created by our idea of the sexes as "opposite."

An old alienation between the sexes springs from a real cause: we are trying to love one another and at the same time, despite all our vaunted modernity, we are trying to keep the "opposite sex" opposite. Perhaps because of inherited ideals of the manly man and the womanly woman, we still tend to shun those elements of the "opposite" sex that we discover in ourselves. For example, the popular theory that women would like to be men is far from easily demonstrable: they may envy masculine freedom and societal largess to roam, and power over the physical world; but few women, it would appear, are happy to be found with male characteristics. On the countdown to a moment of truth, it is likely that most women would prefer being as they are. They dislike, in most men, the heavy-hoofed imagery, the sloppiness, the physical combativeness, lumbering vanity, and general insensitivity to the tender things of life—and, in the main, would rather keep the opposite sex opposite. Moreover, this disrelish of contrasexual elements is even more noticeable among men. Few of them would regard as other than preposterous the idea that they'd rather be female. Often, in our culture, men are apt to dislike the emotionalism of women. Sheepish in the presence of other than lodge-meeting emotion, they sense that they are somehow betraying their sex if they are found in heartfelt tears. Swift to deprecate male poets and music-lovers as febrile petunias who couldn't drive a nail, they are scandalized by any visible

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sign of feminine reaction in themselves. They also would just as soon keep the opposite sex opposite.

This refusal to accept contrasexual elements is more than simply a source of endless misunderstanding: it may be one of the basic causes for failure of modern people to have and give joy in marriage. The qualities that they have repudiated in themselves they may end by repudiating in their mate—and not even know this cause of their irritability and discontent.

What we thrust aside, like a toad that has leaped on the well-appointed table of our certainties, is an idea as old as the ancients and as new as the latest psychiatric journal: the idea that the “opposite” sex we prefer to locate “out there” is really within ourselves. Our “other half” is within. That many ancient peoples were apparently aware of this “twoness” can be seen in their artistic representations. For example, the hermaphroditic figure of Shakti and Shiva, especially popular in the early world, symbolized this essential union of the opposites within the same person. Unfortunately, the emerging development of this ancient idea in modern psychology has not been wholly to the taste of either man or woman. Ever since Jung developed the idea of man as having his *anima*, or female side, and of woman as having her *animus*, or male component, many people have held the whole theory in disrelish and wondered why he presented it at all. After all, what does it matter that we have a component of the opposite sex in ourselves?

To a surprising degree, the joy or misery of marriage may depend on whether the couple can truly join forces on the basis of wholeness—that is to say, each bringing and releasing to the other something of the male and of the female. Out of this “double encounter,” as Jung calls it, may come far more

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companionship and joyous intimacy than accrues when the sexes are locked in the battle of the opposites.

There were two couples I once began noticing especially in our discussion circle. One husband was large and awkward, and his wife quite small; and yet to watch them, one had the impression that they were two children unconscious of themselves, holding hands and with the involuntary little smiles of children who have just had Christmas. The other couple were not like children, ever. Noticeable in their manner was something of the sad mustiness of Morris chairs before a dying fire. This husband was extremely well-favored but he looked as though it were not his idea to be in the company of the human race, and his wife seemed to grow smaller with each week's circle, like one of those mummified Egyptian felines who would be kittenish if only she were alive.

Both couples paid me visits aboard ship before the year was out, and the Morris-chair couple came first. The wife, who did not come belowdecks, apologized by saying she needed air and often suffered from claustrophobia. Her husband, also, as he sat opposite me in the main cabin, seemed to suffer from lack of air, staring now and again up the hatchway and talking of irrelevant matters as though guilty of effeminacy by his presence. Mercifully, I showed him around the ship, explaining the fuel and generator systems; and only after a discussion about the relative merits of inside versus outside chainplates did he feel sufficiently buttressed by masculine surroundings to get around to saying what he wanted to say.

“Look,” he began, “my wife thinks I ought to talk to you and I don’t know why. I understand our whole problem anyway—but I can tell you a few things I’ve learned about women!” In a gay, conspiratorial mood, then, he talked about

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women—in general—now that his masculinity had been rescued.

How differently the second couple behaved! When they came down even the gimballed lanterns in the salon seemed to reflect their glow of life. The husband wanted to know about books—he had never read much, he pointed out; but now he was learning about plays and poetry and, of all things, had even attended a style show while his delighted spouse sat by his elbow explaining to him about fabrics. It was as though he had nothing of his masculinity to lose by these excursions. He was all there, his robustness and his feminine side, and he was linking both with his wife. Nor was she far behind. She'd been fishing with him and learning to take the fish off their hooks. . . . Well, but surely this wouldn't go on? Wait until after the children came? They came, and it went on as before: for they had both learned to outgrow their early pictures of perfect maleness and perfect femaleness and were thereby released to cross over to each other on the bridge of contrasexuality they discovered in themselves.

Unless we cross over this bridge to our mate we may marry only to find ourselves battling from opposite shores. Few persons who feel they must cling to their mask of perfect maleness, or femaleness, realize what the close contacts of marriage can do to frustrate their pictures of themselves. Used to exhibiting his robustness, the male now finds himself in the awkward position of having a companion so intimate that she knows his weaknesses and even his babylike self that lies just under his formidable manner of clearing his throat. Similarly, his wife who has seen herself as entirely feminine may object to her emerging role as a stevedore on the ship of matrimony. Each has stolen the other's perfect mask, and in the process of the theft has gone also the feel-

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ing each had of personal identity: the male is no longer perfectly male, his wife no longer perfectly female. And, under such conditions, they have all the ammunition required for an emerging battle of the "opposite" sexes.

It is no sign of maturity for a man to feel that he has surrendered his quality of glorious robustness the moment he has quoted a line of poetry or shed tears at a play. On the contrary, it would seem, his sheepish revulsion before the cultural materials of life sets him apart as almost unique in the history of homo sapiens—and sets him apart from linkage with his wife as well. If Americans are losing the joys of love—and it is not impossibly true—this is because they have spurned, both male and female, the taking of some ancient bridges that could lead them across to each other.

Behind the continuing, well-nigh universal hunger for love lies always the question: What are we willing to exchange? Perhaps the great exchange begins when two persons in their bond of nourishment are strong enough to afford to give love, wise enough to know it is neither possible nor desirable to capture the source of their enchantment, and flexible enough to bridge the gulf of the "opposite" sex and enjoy each other as whole persons.

15.

How to Enjoy Our Imperfect Tomorrows

IT IS TIME TO BEGIN ENJOYING THE EARTH IN A NEW way.

Most of the imperfectionists described in this book are gone: Socrates, for all his ironic flute-playing, is incapable of adding one note to the performance; Montaigne, though his tower still stands in Perigord, cannot add a line to the maxims he wrote on the joists and transverse beams; nor can Adler spin more jokes among friends at the "Whiff of Tobacco." It is we ourselves who have inherited the earth—ourselves who can, in this fantastic warehouse of inherited information, draw deep breath to select the games of fancy, of sharing, of loving, and of creating we would like for our tomorrows.

Obviously, one measure as to whether we will or will not live well in the warehouse we have received from yesterday is our ability to leave room for tomorrow's growth. Most of us are slow growers, which means that most of our growth will take place tomorrow and cannot be hoped for today.

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The most foolish thing we could do in closing this book would be to imagine that anything has been changed within us simply by its perusal. So often our guidebooks—and this one cannot be accounted an exception—leave the reader with an “on the mark, get set” attitude and it is only later found out that he is not going anywhere. While every encouragement needs to be given to the reader to seek out such other books as will inevitably arise to deal more clearly and incisively with the themes ventured upon in this one, it would not be fair if I failed to follow my own rules and suggest how we might provide ourselves with some sort of “go” for our tomorrows.

Driving over the mountains and along the desert roads on the rounds of my lectures, I used to wonder what brought people out every week to puzzle together with me over the ideas and personalities I evoke from the past: Why did each audience seem to have so much in common? Often after the lecture when all the chairs in the auditorium were oriented in what we call the “great circle” and I took my place to moderate an hour’s worth of crucial but amiable disagreements among the group, I wondered why these strangers from different religions, status-levels and ways of living were coming back each week as though they had more in common with one another than with most of the people they already knew. Thinking about this, I found myself remembering what Thomas Carlyle said when he was told that a famous lady of the day had “accepted the universe.” He cried: “Egad, she’d better!” Then I had an answer. What all of us were doing that seemed worthwhile and brought us to enjoy one another, was this: we were trying to accept the universe. We were accepting, for consideration, all the flaws and foolishness of past experimenters whose tastes were different from ours. In consequence of our strivings

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to accept the universe we were growing better able to accept one another. There is a certain cumulative value in such acceptance, especially when as a result we ourselves are accepted.

Accepting the universe may sound like a large order, but a sensible and effective way of enjoying our own tomorrows is surely to accept one universal aspect of it: that our tomorrows are going to be imperfect. No improvement in conditions, advancement in business, fame, love, or money will eliminate our quota of tomorrow's perturbations, reversals, and failures, for they make up our daily predicament in this world. We are not helped toward joy by imagining otherwise. On the contrary, there is no sense in trying to mature our sense of pleasure in life unless we are prepared to recondition our thoughts and verbal expressions to allow for the presence of tomorrow's imperfection.

As we have considered together in these pages some of our perfectionist habits in society and how to release their hold upon us, I have argued that this release is necessary if we are not to stunt our growth and hamper our human relations. Our dreams of perfection are likely to suffer severe bruising as we move toward later life. It is not this bruising, however, that does the worst damage: it is the misdirection and waste of our energies over a period of years in fruitless pursuit of perfection that often prevents us from finding the excellence which in adult life we could have. It is one of the ironies of life that so long as we insist upon doing everything perfectly we suffer, make everybody around us suffer, and succeed in doing nothing very well. The Greeks knew better. Instead of praying for perfection of love, wealth, and happiness, they prayed peacefully little imperfectionist dreams such as this one: "May I learn to love the beautiful and desire the attainable." To them a foolish insistence upon

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perfection not only prevents excellence but also spoils for us those joys in life to which otherwise we would be heir.

Acceptance of the universe may take many forms that affect for the better human efficiency, but one of them especially concerns us here as a prerequisite for enjoying life: that is to accept the universal imperfection and accept ourselves as part of it. We may have wondered earlier why Egyptians placed such an emphasis upon joy-sharing rather than picture-straightening. Their greetings to one another, such as "Make a good day" and "Make for thyself joy" suggest it was up to the individual to make the day good. Surviving statues of royal Egyptian couples that show them standing with arms around each other and with a secret smile often invite the surmise that they were each other's most delightful source of joy. Perhaps, despite the annual inundations that made of their fertile Nile delta the most wearisome valley on earth to maintain, they found time for one another. "Diminish not the time of following thy heart," Ptah-hotep used to say to his people twenty-seven centuries before Christ. "Shorten not the daytime more than is needful to maintain thy house. For riches are of no avail to the weary." When we learn of the freedom accorded wives who, far from being prisoners in their limewashed houses, came and went as they pleased, faces uncovered, hair dyed blue or sunbleached to dazzling white; when we learn that in the marriage ceremonial the husband had to promise to obey his wife and was regarded as a guest in her home; and then when we look further and find that the exchange of gaiety and laughter in the home had virtually a religious purpose—we commence to be in instructive trouble. For we see also that the tomb was their university, the funeral their classroom, and that their wealth was lavished on structures for the dead. When all their fun, games, rituals, and dances

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were learned in the shadow of the pyramids of death, how could they have found joy at all?

From the tombs themselves comes the answer. Where each pyramid ascended to the sky, it served to remind man that he cannot stand so high; its shadow lengthening on the ground showed that man's little shadow cannot extend so far, and that his shadow, no matter what his thoughts about himself, may not be kept for long. Imperfect man's little time is now, they seemed to say, and he must come down quickly from rickety little pyramids of his own vanity in time to have and bring joy.

Much though we might like to see ourselves as persons who confer joy upon others, a fact of psychic life seems to be that we cannot confer joy unless we are essentially joyous persons ourselves—that is, persons who have accepted the universe and settled down to grow in it. Who, then, are the people who appear to us to have a great capacity for joy? Perhaps they are those who have accepted the universal imperfection and have accepted themselves as part of it. When we make a moral decision to give up our dream of being the perfect exception in an imperfect universe, something gives up in us that had prevented us from recognizing and enjoying one another. We are led back to laughter, to amiable self-disclosure, and to an ability to love much that is imperfect around us. For all our loss of inherited myths and illusions we would be well compensated if by an imperfectionist view of life we could remove some of the joylessness that exists behind the prepared faces of modern people, take some of the embitterment out of failure, some of the acrimony out of matrimony, and replace these by a more solidly grounded ability to share joy with one another during our time on the planet.

Among all the symbolic representations of attitudes that

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have come down to us from the warehouse of the past, three stand out as helpful in accepting the universe and our position in it: the half-blind man, the inverted pyramid, and the qualified teachers—and they help us in questioning some of our most persistent answers.

(1) Who are we? Perhaps we are the Half-Blind Man (see Socrates, Bacon, Montaigne, Shaw, etc.). In a world of galloping positive thinking we dare to begin with a negation: we *don't* see clearly nor know ourselves and others very well. Our notion that we will ever "see life clearly and see it whole" is presumptuous in the face of the universe and poisonous to human friendship. We can become acquainted, but not until we behave as though we are half-blind, show our ignorance cheerfully to one another, and ask those questions to which we were always supposed to have the answers.

(2) Where are we? Probably at the bottom of an Inverted Pyramid. Ordinarily man sees himself as standing on the broad base of his own pyramid, a proprietor in understanding of all that he surveys. He then seeks to gather all that he has learned upward into an apex, or final answer, that will be Truth for the entire pyramid. It follows that since each man and each nation makes a special apex and calls it Truth, the natural conflicts and perturbations to which we are heir are soon compounded by others of our own making.

If we invert this pyramid, however, so that it stands upon its own apex, and place ourselves at the narrow bottom, the whole picture is changed. We are now like William Blake's man who sees only "through chinks in his cavern." The higher we climb from this narrow bottom the greater becomes our area of concern. Presently we may notice that everything in the widening pyramid relates, in one way or another, to the little man at the chink in the bottom. And

as we climb, many ways of looking into past and present provide us with a stockpile of alternatives for meeting the widening life. They even spark in us the comic and thus lead to self-acceptance.

(3) Who shall teach us? The Qualified Teachers. And who are they? All who are in the pyramid with us, for it is our alertness that qualifies them as our teachers. When we doubt not that we can learn from their thoughts, voices, and silences, they become teachers qualified by us, and a discussion becomes a way of listening together in a spirit that accepts the uniquely instructive element in us all. To accept each of our companions as a qualified teacher, in his own setting, without the wish on our part that he leave his setting and take up ours, is one way to break out of the bottom of our own pyramid and thus arrange for more breathing room in our lives.

We began by saying it is time to free ourselves from perfectionist trappings so that we can start enjoying the earth in a new way. Have you thought, perhaps, that there is nothing new under the sun? Everything is always new under the sun. Even the early Greeks noticed this and observed that the psychic arrangements of human life were forever changing. They used to say that no man could dip his hand in the same stream twice. Epicharmus, who was a wag-about-town, went so far with this idea as to suggest it meant one was released from owing yesterday's bills since he had already become a different person today.

What does all this have to do with our tomorrows? It invites the reflection that from the moment we gear our behavior to an idea that is new to us, even when it is thousands of years old, that idea becomes new *in* us and we have become something new under the sun. New ideas working within us can cause us, moreover, to enjoy the earth in a

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new way—not as obedient puppets dangled from the strings of well-meaning persons who need our dangling for their thriving, but as the far more useful, unique persons that we are.

This is what the psychologists mean by “individuation.” It is the deeply active work within us of an intensely felt need to knock off role-playing, to strip off the false wrappings of the “persona,” or mask, and to take charge of ourselves. In all that has been said thus far, acceptance is not to be taken to mean placidity or supineness before life. On the contrary, an imperfectionist attitude of acceptance is a moral decision to take responsibility for ourselves with all our flaws and failings. No longer can our actions be excused on the score that we are the perfect exception in an imperfect universe, nor can they be ignored by the handy view that they are merely incidents along our way to tomorrow’s perfection. Our own foolish minds, memories, and sinews have taken responsibility for what we do to ourselves and to other people.

In far-off days we were not ashamed to speak about the toughness of the task of taking charge of ourselves. But somewhere along the corridor of history we decided we had already taken charge, and this opened the way for everyone else to take charge of us. We forgot that taking charge of ourselves means also developing resistance against the well-meaning molders of human life. Lord Byron’s remark quoted earlier that “a man must calculate upon his powers of resistance before he goes into the arena” is germane to our problem of individuation today. That most of us live in an electronic arena may be no news, but it is time to make it news to ourselves that we may have bilked ourselves out of our selfhood because we took for granted our resistance until, with the help of others, we had none.

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How strange it is that we Americans who value our freedom so highly have so seldom invaded the area where our freedom is most in jeopardy—our own psychic life. When we hear of the permeation of psychic life by those skilled in enticing, subliminally motivating and otherwise inducing us to become unwitting victims of Shoulditis, we may regret these things as unfortunate interferences with the lives of others but at the same time assume within ourselves an adequate power of resistance.

One precondition for better enjoyment of our tomorrows is a resistance by liberating ourselves as best we can from the tyranny of other people's "shoulds" before they prevent us from finding the "wants" in our own life. If this seems like a strong statement, which it is, this is because we are beginning to learn today that many of our major compromises in order not to hurt other people's pictures of us as we "should be" ultimately compound the very hurts we would most like to avoid.

No method of walking forward has ever been devised that does not leave some ground behind us. If we go forward into companionships where mutual exchange of joy is possible, for example, we may need to leave behind us other relationships that have been habitual but joyless. Do not imagine that in love and marriage this amounts to a plea for mindless promiscuity or for easy exercising of the wish to run away, which sometimes threatens to overcome us when clashes and disharmonies begin to cloud a relationship. Perfection of love, of understanding, of agreement upon ways of doing things has never been discoverable in our world past or present. When I say that individuation is fundamental to human growth and joy and therefore needs to be sought, I am urging that we learn to run *forward* from those relationships where no mutual sustenance can be found to

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exist. Of course, a certain amount of "graceful giving in" is necessary in society, and there is often nothing lost and much gained by acceding to the wishes of relatives, friends, and neighbors so long as these do not become a dominant pattern in our lives. But so often they do become just that. Out of our wish to belong, to please, and to avoid scenes accrues such a shattering of integrity that we no longer know what we want in individual life. Many persons still believe, today, that there is something fine and noble in the sacrifice of selfhood on the altar of other people's wishes. More and more, however, we are learning that the person who thus allows himself to be cut off from his own uniqueness and cut into fragments for the sake of others soon becomes a fragmented person who has no joy. Even if he does not sully the day of those who bound his psyche by niggardly reminders of what he has "lost" for their sake, he nevertheless exhibits this piteous loss daily by his disrelish for life that is the punishment of the fragmented person.

Nothing can come from dutiful, habitual submission of ourselves in such relationships that does not open within us a Pandora's box of resentments that may lead to usury in the name of friendship, and punishment in the name of love. The forward walk toward individuation is well worth the hurts, if by our emergence as self-regulating individuals we are able truly to like those we say we like and truly serve those we claim to serve.

Belief that we must have space in which to become ourselves before we can be useful to others is not a new idea. In his ninety-ninth year Theophrastus took time off from his wrestling and dancing to write a book about "characters" he saw daily in Athens. And in order that we of 2300 years later in our adjustment-century could not miss his meaning, he

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made clear that people have to find their way according to their own uniqueness or they suffer.

A neighbor of his, in thought, although not in time, continued this theme when he wrote: "You must have sea-room, even to tell the truth in." Herman Melville meant that you can't hoist your sails without risk to others unless your own ship has plenty of room in which to make its way. Both men, lovers of the sea, used to watching ships as well as people who resembled various kinds of ships, knew the value of sea-room in human life.

Our own ship is likely to have its peculiarities. Some people are like those sturdy power-cruisers I see every day in the harbor that have no sails and are most useful when moving in close waters, or when tied to a dock with the warm light coming from the portholes and gaiety in evidence within. Their security and worth is right there: for by their construction they would flounder at sea. Other people, we know not how, seem to have been born like ships with sails. For them the furled sails mildew. They cannot even tell truth or bring usefulness to others unless they live in an atmosphere conducive to the raising of their sails and the surge of their passage. Their nature demands sea-room. As it is unwise to urge the sailless ship to sea, so it becomes disastrous to confine the sailing ship to a dock.

I think Theophrastus knew this; and he might have added, for all we know, that the chronically suffering person seldom lacks capacity but rather knowledge of where his own ship can best make its home. This need for sea-room in human life is usually apparent to a psychologist, for in his work he deals with the sufferings and frustrations of many persons whose living arrangements have not allowed them to get up the sails of their own psychic ship. Some of his patients are in a dilemma: they can't raise sail and they can't get out.

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Small wonder the psychologist may go home at night wishing he could reshuffle the people of his town—relocate them among other persons better equipped to appreciate and to foster their own unique ways of raising sail.

Such dilemmas are seldom solved, but sometimes they can be transcended. Significantly, there are at our disposal several ways by which we can learn to see things in a new way, become new, and with our newness stockpile our own alternatives for tomorrow's better sea-room.

One way of stockpiling our alternatives before we need them is to develop an imperfectionist's relish for reading. Often we may prevent ourselves from gaining benefits from reading our way upward into wider areas of concern in our own pyramid, simply because we have taken too seriously an old perfectionist idea that we must understand every word we read. We stop the train of thought when a chapter becomes difficult while we puzzle ourselves over passages and references, or simply put the book down. No wonder few of the "classics" are ever finished by modern people: they abound in references to persons, ideas, and events so foreign to us that they sound like the description of a party to which we have not been invited. An imperfectionist attitude toward reading begins, on the other hand, with the assumption that we will never understand the whole of any subject, and so we may as well keep going. There is simply too much richly provocative, exciting, guffaw-making material in our literary heritage for us to miss out on it because of cumbrous perfectionist habits. Many worthwhile books can be discovered when we read with an imperfectionist's reckless relish. Nothing, for example, seemed duller to me in prospect than the four volumes of Plutarch's *Lives* and I might have thought so to this day had it not been for reckless reading. Suddenly, after weary sections devoted to the name-drop-

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ping of generals, there burst from the page a little scene in which Phocion, condemned to death and about to take hemlock, finds he hasn't the money to pay the chemist preparing the potion. Since the chemist won't take an I.O.U. from a man about to die, Phocion, one of the great and famous men of his day, has to look around the streets for someone to lend him the money to die on. All these generals and their battles were only a trellis-work through which I could peer into an enchanting and often very funny world.

Another way of stockpiling our awareness of sensations is to take a second look at poetry—I say “second look” because, for most of us, the first look produced in us such a hearty disrelish for the “poetic” that we would not look that way again willingly.

One burden that used to chafe Lord Byron as much as his misfortunes in love was the high-flown eloquence of his friend Thomas Moore. A moment always came when Byron could no longer listen to Moore making airless lavenders and laces out of perfectly good syllables. Byron would stamp his bad foot and say: “Dammit, Tom, don't be so poetical!”

Byron did not know, of course, that he was voicing the feelings of generations of persons yet unborn, who in a thousand American classrooms would become aroused to mistrust Byron as well as the “poetical,” and to acquire a strong aversion to poetry itself. Today, for a large percentage of American youth, poetry—whether by Byron or by anybody else—has come to be regarded as no more than a seaside diversion of emotionally-sundered women in large hats.

Certainly no one dislikes the poetical, in Byron's sense of the word, more than I do, for I used to sit with others attending the official crucifixion of poetry in school. When we heard such lines as Shelley's:

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“O lift me from the grass;
I die, I faint, I fail!
My cheek is cold and white, alas!”

the only reaction I had is most appropriately put in French: *“Il me fait grincer les dents.”* (It makes me gnash my teeth.) Most of us realized that real people no longer indulge in fainting as a token of the significance they attach to amorous dalliance. Even if they did, what girl would care to lift from the grass such a pasteurized poet? Worst of all was that poetry was taught as something courageous and passionate, by teachers who gave evidence neither of courage nor of passion, and that such lines as those above were always mouthed in a dried lemon-rind way by someone who had never been out of her syllabus long enough to recline on the grasses of this warm and passionate world.

Poetry remained, but it was a magic world outside these dreary veils of the poetic and we could not see it. Since we were commanded for the sake of grades to love what we could neither see nor hear, we could only resent the fact that old poets would not stay dead and resolve that once we were free to do so we would set heavy stones of indifference upon their graves.

Any second look at poetry that can effectually roll back the stones of our early indifference calls for us to develop an imperfectionist way of looking at life, a way based on acknowledgment that there is more to see than we have seen. For poetry is concerned with strangeness—the strangeness that lies at the heart of so-called commonplace things, forcing us to look and look again until these things are no longer seen as commonplace at all.

When we find ourselves wandering as imperfectionists, childlike, through a world where familiar things have lost

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their labels and have taken on strangeness, we have experienced poetry. Often, we prefer as perfectionists not to think of the world as a strange place, since we have to live in it and are obliged for the most part to accept the order things seem to have and the names they go by. As we are likely to find out, however, our journey is by no means an orderly one among orderly events. We can be plunged into an experience of insight or of ecstasy that holds such sway over us that "no words can express it." It is then that we most crave words. We open the little bundle of words that we have, tumbling them forth to let other people know what we have felt; and if we had more words we would like to salvage our sensations on paper, for they filled us with life. We would set them down so that when our life grew dreamless and mechanical we could call them up again by way of stoking the fire of our life.

Because both men and women need poetry, poetry wants to be born in all of us. On the whitened, salt-caked lips of the fisherman rescued from his confrontation with death at sea, poetry wants to be born. On the lips of a woman who thought herself forever lost from companionship and who found love once more, poetry wants to be born. Under the accents produced by strong feeling, you can hear the unmistakable pull of the iambic. It is the pull of poetry trying to be born in us, in order to restore our real strangeness to life, and life to our strangeness.

Whenever honest poetry is born on paper it has the effect of a remembered emotion that is now captured in a rhythmic structure. It is a river of feeling with waves and boundaries; and the poet may have made his river very carefully, trying to keep away counterfeit waves of sentimentality in order the better to perform his work of showing us a river that is deep within ourselves.

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When a poem is "great" for us it performs the function as well of rescuing life from banality. We may have been living like Lot's wife in modern dress—transfixed before the billboards—but suddenly we begin to pay attention (or pay reverence, if you like) to all the strangeness around the billboards. Abruptly, on the verge of paying for color television, we are reminded that for nothing more than the paying of attention we can discover that we are already in color, and that exactly nothing contrived by General Motors is quite so colorful as a squirrel, or a human, under the unrivaled key lights of sun and moon. We are rescued, called back from banality to the primary excitement of having eyes and ears on a very strange planet; and so the poet has done his work.

Today our respect for the quest to discover rivers within has largely been replaced by a passion for travel that is broadening. Many tours of Europe, for instance, are designed for the perfectionist who wants to see nothing but say he did. Thus he can sit in the swirling color-wheel of Europe and hear English spoken; all his little tickets are bought for him and he can learn, once and for all, about the Mind of Europe and other safe *things* that never existed. On the other hand, when one travels on his own, whether to Europe or down the block, he at once enters upon a wonderful kind of trouble that soon reduces any vestigial perfectionism he had in him when he started.

One sure way to have your perfectionism reduced in Europe, for example, is to go to any large city and then *look for something*. At once you join the club of millions of other travelers in whom all perfectionist pictures wilt in the scramble to locate monuments, ruins, restaurants, hotels, pissoirs, a drink of water, or simply a place to sit down. All steps are hurried, heads swing as at a tennis match to avoid assault by car or breadloaf-carrying citizen and everyone's eyes are

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focused for distance in the enervating, fruitless effort to read street signs that are thirty feet up on the masonry craftily obscured by advertisements and old laundry and which, besides, have not been painted for a hundred years. Here and there stand tourists reading maps as regardless of the life around them as old Florentine statues. Since the maps are impossible to read anyway, these people stand a long while in their own imperfection before resuming the quest for a drink of water, a pissoir, a place to sit down.

Another way to reduce your perfectionism abroad is simply to ask your way on a map. This will reveal to you, once and for all, that clumsiness is the shadow of cleverness. Western Germany today, for example, in a hundred directions exhibits her leadership in technical skills and precision workmanship; and yet Germany has the worst maps in Europe. I know, because they can't read them themselves. Not daring at first to believe my own surmise, I experimented on auto-club men and policemen from Berlin to Munich. I said: "Show me on the map."

This seemed at first like a normal request. The man would take the map into his hands, gingerly, regard it with growing astonishment, and fall into a deep study. He would then be joined by another man who would call a third into conference; and since three persons standing over a map in Europe make a drama, I would soon be forgotten in the rapidly forming crowd and could quietly, guiltily slip away. Only then did I realize that the words, "Show me on the map" are the meanest words you can say to any man in Europe.

From the foregoing you may have gathered that it is not easy for a perfectionist to enjoy himself abroad. Actually, it is not easy for him to go down the block. Other travelers who go out of their doors can become resignedly confused,

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happily lost travelers who receive their daily predicament cheerfully. No perfectionist, on the other hand, can relish the thought of being lost, and certainly he cannot conceive of being happily lost. He must exhibit the "I know where I am" attitude and this produces strain, especially when everybody else knows that he is lost.

What often puzzles Europeans about Americans, by the way, is how they can manage to bear the strain of "knowing before they're told." So many languages and behavioral codes in Europe are encountered daily in the smallest store, that a certain amount of attentiveness, patience, tact, and plain acknowledgment of ignorance is required to get anything done. Americans, on the other hand, who are always quoting Burns' lines about "seeing ourselves as others see us" (and who would be so profoundly shocked if ever they did see themselves that they would wish Burns to take his "giffie" back again) have almost no idea at all as to how they appear to a European. They have not learned that half the fun in the world begins in surrender of the "knowing before told" look and in the adoption of the "happily lost" attitude.

Whether in consequence of insights gained from reading, the second look at life's strangeness through poetry, or from travel, it is a wonderful moment in life when we have freed ourselves from the old nervous need to believe we know things already. Now and then some of us do find reasons for ceasing to exhibit ourselves as honor graduates from the school of life. Significantly, those who can go through life in this way as "happily lost" travelers are in a better position, it would seem, to give and receive the imperfect joys of this earth. The perfectionists, even more lost than other people, will not let themselves be found nor ask help in finding themselves. Habitually annoyed with today's conditions and

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looking for tomorrow's relief, they are sealed off against all relief tomorrow. For the tomorrow toward which they yearn will bring new reasons for anguish, more elaborate problems of concealment, and will lead to an even deeper withdrawal from the joys of life to which they would otherwise be heir.

It would seem that we contain our tomorrows within us: ours is the problem of recognizing, nourishing, and fostering the expansion of capacities already present. Often we have wondered: "What is going to happen to me in the next ten years?" Seldom have we asked a question of more far-reaching importance in our lives: "What is going to happen *in* me in the next ten years in consequence of what I am thinking and doing now?"

To this question an answer is provided in the history of man's attitudes toward life. If we are perfectionists, annoyed with today's conditions and looking for tomorrow's relief, we can expect to be annoyed tomorrow. On the other hand, if we have made a moral decision to take charge of our imperfect selves in an imperfect world, we can expect to have more sea-room for ourselves and more breathing room for those who are close to us, as well as greater capacity for receiving joy and giving joy in the years to come.

To the extent that we contain our tomorrows within us we hold the power to enjoy the earth in a new way. It is the way of the happily lost traveler, who has looked at his imperfect self long enough to love it and not mind being lost with it.

Only when we love our imperfect selves can we inherit the good imperfect earth. For then, at last, we can afford to ask the questions that help to reveal the earth, because we have agreed to love a happily lost self. We can afford to make the mistakes that are the precondition of travel, because we have contracted to love a mistake-making self.

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We can afford to enjoy flawed people in peace, for we have made our peace with a flawed self; we can afford to be vulnerable in the exchange of love, for we are unafraid to give the self we love away; we can afford to become more humanity-righteous, because we no longer need to be self-righteous.

Most importantly we are not made miserable by failure to reach our own complete development. On the imperfect earth nothing is ever quite finished. This is why Montaigne could say: "Let Death find me planting my cabbages, more concerned for its coming, and less concerned for my unfinished garden." He had grown to love an unfinished garden: for, in all probability, he had ceased to imagine that it could be finished. It would seem that when we have lost our perfectionist notion that things must be complete we are released to find and to love the unfinished garden that we are.

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